VISIT…

Burning Darkness

A Half Century of Spanish Cinema

edited by Joan Ramon Resina
with assistance from Andrés Lema-Hincapié

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SUNY series in Latin American and Iberian Thought and Culture
Jorge J. E. Gracia and Rosemary Geidorfer Feal, editors

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Introduction

Joan Ramon Resina

Over the last half century, visual stories have claimed an ever-larger share of the popular culture, as literature initiated its gradual descent to a quantitatively and qualitatively more restricted audience. During this time, film has achieved technical sophistication and social prestige. It is now firmly established as an academic discipline in its own right, enjoying pride of place within the larger paradigm of Cultural Studies. But although Spanish film is today the object of teaching and research in many departments, analytical resources are still scarce in English. The existence of a few histories of Spanish cinema (the best of which, John Hopewell's *Out of the Past*, has long been out of print), of specialized work on a few privileged directors (Buñuel, Saura, and Almodóvar), and a handful of collections of essays (notably those edited by Peter William Evans and Barry Jordan) does not cover the interpretive needs of the English-speaking student of Spanish cinema, who is often at the mercy of reviews of scant exegetical value.

The present volume is intended as a contribution to remedy this relative dearth by offering a set of original pieces on carefully selected directors and films spanning the period from the origins of the New Spanish Cinema in the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century. It would be easy to draw attention to what is missing and to dispute the choices made. Every selection entails judgments of value and one chooses at one's peril. But it is also true that books have a fate. However, rather than recounting the history of the editorial choices that have led to this particular constellation of films, I would like to use this introduction to provide a broad sense of the directions of Spanish cinema in the years studied by the contributors. It is not a question of providing a compact history of a half century of Spanish film but rather of sketching a sense of its development, however simplified or simplistic the result may be.

Our history of Spanish cinema starts in 1952 with *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!*, the first international success in the post-Civil War period. Although approved by Franco personally (Díez Puertas 303) and presented as the official Spanish entry to the Cannes Film Festival the following year, *Bienvenido* inaugurated the critical cinematography that comprises the best Spanish movies of the following decades. Today, Luis García Berlanga's *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* and Juan Antonio Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista* (1955) are widely considered the two unquestionable classics from the period leading up to the New Spanish Cinema of the 1960s. Both of these works sought, in different ways, to overcome the censor's zeal with discourses that hinted at the social conditions toward the end of the autarchy through the detours of humor (Berlanga) or the *crise de conscience* of a wayward member of the hegemonic bourgeoisie (Bardem).

Bardem operated with the basic assumption that guided the social realist literature of the same period. "Film—he said—will be either a form of witnessing or nothing" (*Cinema universitario* n. 4, December 1956, qtd. Heredero, *Las huellas* 298). Others agreed. But "witnessing" could be understood in different ways and did in fact give rise to different methods, each attempting in its own way to circumvent the structural impossibility of reproducing the lessons of Italian neorealism in a Spanish context. Thus, alongside Bardem's deadpan moralism in *Muerte de un ciclista* and *Calle Mayor* (1955), Marco Ferreri launched his biting satires of Franco's happy society. Leaning on scripts drenched with the blustery humor of Rafael Azcona, Ferreri undertook a mordant critique of the dictatorship's developmental myths in *El pisito* (1958), *Los chicos* (1959), and, especially, *El cochecito* (1960), an original crossbreed of Italian neorealism and Spanish grotesque. The theoretical impulse for a critical cinema came from the legendary "conversations" at Salamanca in May 1955, pointing the way to the New Spanish Cinema. On this occasion, Bardem declared, "Spanish cinema is politically ineffective, socially false, intellectually abject, aesthetically nonexistent and commercially crippled" (qtd. Besas 41), implicitly turning this first conference on national film into the zero degree of post-Civil War cinema.

In the meantime, Luis Buñuel, the sole international referent of Spanish cinema, had continued his career in exile. For the young Spanish directors, who depended on an anemic industry, his series of low-budget films shot in Mexico were a usable lesson in the kind of diagnostic realism that had been advocated at Salamanca. Thus, in 1960 a group of people, including the young Saura, who had produced *Los golfos* the previous year, convinced Buñuel to shoot a film in Spain. *Viridiana* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival as the official Spanish entry on May 17, 1961, but it was subsequently banned in Spain as a result of the Vatican's irate

reaction. Having become the object of diplomatic persecution, *Viridiana* was saved by the fact that the Mexican husband of the lead actress, Silvia Pinal, was its main financier, and through this circumstance the film acquired Mexican nationality (Edwards 144).

While Spanish directors centered in Madrid searched for a national idiom, in Barcelona a young group of aspiring filmmakers tried to develop a cinema based on an international sensibility, though in fact indebted to the *nouvelle vague* of Truffaut and Godard. In the past, Barcelona had pioneered film production in Spain, but the dictatorship's concentration of resources in Madrid had led to the dismantling of Barcelona's film industry. In the ruins of that industry and deprived of the subventions that the government reserved for degree-holders of Madrid's Official School of Cinema, the members of the School of Barcelona practiced an antirealist film with hardly any exposure to national audiences and virtually no attention abroad. Even in Barcelona, this adventure achieved little more than private repercussion. Aesthetically, the films of the School strived to be cosmopolitan but did not even manage to become local, except in the narrowest sense: a neighborhood affair in the upper-class districts of Sarrià and Sant Gervasi.

It is true that in Spain no other film movement has drawn as much hostility as the School of Barcelona, but it would be unfair to suggest that the displeasure was principally motivated by the frustration of the alternative projects of the New Spanish Cinema and an aborted Catalan cinema (Riambau and Torreiro 184). There is a measure of truth in Angel Llorente's scathing attack in "Cine Made in Barcelona," published in *Cinestudio* in January 1968. In this abrasive article Llorente accused the Catalan group of elitism, snobbishness, and a mimetic cosmopolitanism inflected by the communist icons that were popular among the offspring of the European bourgeoisie (Riambau and Torreiro 191). But the critique could also lay bare the conservatism of the proponents of the New Spanish Cinema. In a letter addressed to Jacinto Esteva on June 8, 1968, Francisco Regueiro and Antxon Eceiza assailed this promoter of the Barcelona School because "rumor has it that in your new film you again insult the Spanish people, that is to say, the Castilian essence of this people, whose eternal values Francisco and I have defended more than once at the risk of losing our national identity card." And: "We have heard, that is to say, we have been assured in Cuba that in your film people speak in French, English and Catalan, with the purpose, obviously, that no Spanish worker can understand it, thus creating an aristocratic minority and limiting the access of the masses to culture" (qtd. Riambau and Torreiro 194). Although Regueiro now claims that this letter was meant to be humorous, the truth is that in the 1960s competition between the realist

aesthetics of the New Spanish Cinema and the avant-garde proclivities of the School of Barcelona was keen. Joaquim Jordà wrote at the time: "There are two possible cinemas in Spain: one backward-looking, which explains that we are as we are, and another that explains our present and tries to show how we could be. The first kind is made in Madrid; the second in Barcelona" (qtd. Riambau and Torreiro 189).

Over time, the members of the School of Barcelona have tended to adjust their valuation to the historical judgment on their formal games. Thus, Jordà now regards that phase "with sympathy but without [finding in it] the least efficacy or usefulness" (qtd. Riambau and Torreiro 362). And Pere Portabella, whose *Pont de Varsòvia* (1989) remains the film most clearly conceived in the wake of the School's aesthetic, reminisces about those earlier experiences: "I believe that all that did not happen gratuitously, without cause. But I refuse to sublimate the facts. I think that we must be very critical with the results we achieved" (qtd. Riambau and Torreiro 362). Notwithstanding the predictable failure of a movement that turned its back on both the audiences and their cultural memory, the School's formal experimentation produced long-term effects in the visual style of the mature Saura, in the later films of Vicente Aranda and Gonzalo Suárez, in Bigas Luna, Agustín Villaronga, and, arguably, in the far more coherent analysis of the image in the unclassifiable films of José Luis Guerín.

Catalan cinema did not stage a spectacular comeback at the end of the dictatorship. Reduced during that period to producing no more than a dozen full-length films, and still dependent on undercapitalized ventures, the Catalan film industry was not able to profit from the spectacular cultural budgets of the 1980s and 1990s. Installed in the centralist inertia from the Franco era, the socialist Ministry of Culture refused to transfer the prorated monies from the state's "Protection Fund" to the Catalan government. For its part, the Generalitat has been accused of devoting a larger share of its cultural budget to dubbing than to the production of films unless shot in Catalan. However offensive such a policy may be from the viewpoint of producers, the critique reflects a shallow understanding of the priorities for a society that emerged from the dictatorship with widespread illiteracy in the native language and a total eradication of Catalan from cinema screens. Even now, more than a quarter of a century after the transition to democracy, Catalan cinema is not, to any significant degree, cinema in Catalan. Notwithstanding the existence of social demand, cinema in this language continues to struggle against resistance on the part of distributors and palpable discrimination from exhibitors. The only noteworthy exception to the sense of doom is the case of Ventura Pons. After producing one of the cult films of the

Transition, the documentary *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978), Pons took a dip into the commercially motivating but aesthetically barren low comedy, reemerging in the 1990s with an interesting film based on a literary text by Quim Monzó (*El perquè de tot plegat*, 1994) and then producing in quick succession the stunning *Actrius* (1996) and *Amic/Amat* (1998), both based on plays by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, and two adaptations of the theater of Sergi Belbel: *Carícies* (1997) and *Morir (o no)* (1999). Later came the more questionable *Anita no perd el tren* (2000), which follows a text by Lluís Antón Baulenas; *Menja d'amor/Food of Love* (2002), based on a novel by David Leavitt; *El gran Gato* (2002), an urban documentary about the music of popular singer Gato Pérez; and, more recently, *Amor idiota* (2004), another adaptation of a novel by Baulenas.

But the best moment, commercially, of Catalan cinema came in the 1990s, with Bigas Luna's Iberian sequence *Jamón, jamón* (1992), *Huevos de oro* (1993), and *La teta y la lluna* (1994), a trilogy in which the contradictions of a swiftly but cursorily modernized Spain appear in all the brutality of the country's peculiar "return of the repressed." After reaching this high point, however, the director failed to repeat his commercial feats, and in his subsequent films, *Bambola* (1996), *La camarera del Titanic* (1997), *Volavérunt* (1999), and *Son de mar* (2001), a talented cinematic career appeared to taper out.

During the same period, Basque directors succeeded in creating a cinema of indisputable excellence. Whether the happy cluster of first-rate directors constitutes a national or merely an "autonomous" cinema is a political question that film criticism is not in a position to resolve. What criticism can and should do is to eschew the essentialism that has plagued the analysis of Basque films in Anglo-American academic circuits, where the musty clichés of a centralist mind-set often turn up in the midst of theoretical platitudes. Three stirring films by Imanol Uribe—*El proceso de Burgos* (1979), *La fuga de Segovia* (1981), and *La muerte de Mikel* (1983)—dealing with the latent war between Euzkadi and Spain initiated a string of revelations, from Montxo Armendáriz's lyrical *Tasio* (1984), *Las cartas de Alou* (1990), *Historias del Kronen* (1995), and *Secretos del corazón* (1997), to Julio Medem's technically innovative and psychologically intriguing *Vacas* (1992), *La ardilla roja* (1993), *Tierra* (1996), and *Los amantes del Círculo Polar* (1998). Although these were followed by the unsatisfactory *Lucía y el sexo* (2001), a film with many concessions to low-brow audiences, Medem went on to produce an exceptional survey of political opinion in Euzkadi: the honest and, at the time, plucky *Euskal pilota/La pelota vasca* (2003). In the 1990s Basque cinema was able to balance commercial appeal with technical competence, turning out a satisfactory thriller, *Todo por la pasta* (Enrique Urbizu, 1991); a Satanic comedy, *El Día de la Bestia* (Álex de

la Iglesia, 1995); and high-strung drama in Juanma Bajo Ulloa's *Alas de mariposa* (1991) and *La madre muerta* (1993).

Just as histories of Spanish cinema routinely feature a chapter on the cinema of the "autonomies," they also tend to include a section on women directors. Such protocols raise the question of whether the particular categories thus "distinguished" do not pay too high a price in condescension for their inclusion. Qualitative arguments are superior to quantitative ones, and criticism must be critical rather than all-inclusive. In my view, films by three women fully justify their inclusion in a canonical selection of Spanish film: Pilar Miró, with *El crimen de Cuenca* (1979), *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos* (1980), *Beltenebros* (1992), and *El pájaro de la felicidad* (1993); Icíar Bollaín, with *Hola, ¿estás sola?* (1995), *Flores de otro mundo* (1999), and especially *Te doy mis ojos* (2003); and the Catalan Isabel Coixet, with *Cosas que nunca te dije/Things I Never Told You* (1996) and *A los que aman* (1998).

No account of Spanish film in the last half century may bypass the work of two directors who emerged from the experience of the New Spanish Cinema with great visual proficiency: Basilio Martín Patino, the independently minded producer of *Nueve cartas a Berta* (1965) and the magisterial *Los paraísos perdidos* (1985), and Víctor Erice, a leading light of Spanish cinema, with *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), *El Sur* (1983), and *El sol del membrillo* (1992). Although initially supported by the powerful Elías Querejeta, Erice's demanding craftsmanship ended up discouraging this producer, who withdrew the funds and left *El Sur* an unfinished masterpiece. Thereafter, the director was forced to work outside commercial venues for his outstanding exploration of the relation between the painterly and the cinematic image in his third film. As if he were the victim of a curse, Erice saw the contract for his next project, the filming of Juan Marsé's novel, *El embrujo de Shanghai*, rescinded by Andrés Vicente Gómez without regard for the nearly five years of preliminary work already devoted to the assignment.

Three Spanish films have obtained the coveted Academy Award. The first, Fernando Trueba's *Belle Époque* (1992), was a sexual divertimento with sham historical airs. In this film Trueba dresses up a facile eroticism and a humor bordering on slapstick with the wardrobe of a romanticized Republican era. The most recent one sanctions the lightning career of Alejandro Amenábar, who, while still a student in 1995, debuted with *Tesis*, a thriller rich in metacinematic reflections and an engaging analysis of the voyeuristic drive. The next year Amenábar produced *Abre los ojos* (1997), a tangled play on memory padded with the pseudoscientific belief in physical immortality and the consequent virtualization of experience. Then came *The Others* (2001), a gothic pastiche harking back to the

romantic roots of suspense. But it was with *Mar adentro* (2004), a film based on the real-life struggle of Ramón Sampedro for the right to die, that he struck a sensitive social chord and was awarded the Oscar for best foreign film in 2005.

It would be presumptuous to pretend that this overview renders visible something like a map of Spanish film during the last half century. It is at best the rough outline of an evolution and at worst a random set of subjective preferences. It is meant merely to provide a few points of reference that permit the reader to fill in some of the gaps between the essays that follow. And all the rest is Almodóvar.

1

Rehearsing for Modernity in *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1952)

Eva Woods Peiró

What does it mean to project oneself as both modern and folkloric when one is neither of these things? During Francoist Spain (1939–1975), under a regime that pointedly manipulated the concept of modernity, what were the limits and the possibilities for imagining the nation? *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!*—a parody that joins fairy tale, folkloric musical film, and a potpourri of other film genres—explores these questions in its story about a poor Castilian village, Villar del Río, that plans an extravagant welcome for North American representatives of the Marshall Plan. These delegates, it is promised, will bring aid to the region through the postwar European Recovery Program, named after its chief proponent and strategist, U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall. Of course, Spain would never be a beneficiary of the Marshall Plan.[1] Avoiding recognition of this final outcome until the very end of the film, the plot concentrates on the promising news of the upcoming visit and the delirious preparations of the inhabitants, carried out under the direction of Manolo Morán, the agent of the travelling flamenco performer, Carmen Vargas. The mayor, Don Pablo, owner of half of the town and partial to fantasies of Hollywood Westerns and Spanish folkloric singers, joins forces with Manolo to convince the people that to win the Americans' favor, they must present their own *españolada*, a local, live enactment of

Fig. 1. Villar del Río's square in *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* Courtesy of Filmoteca Española.

the popular Spanish folkloric musical film. Disguising the village as if it were somewhere in Andalusia (Southern Spain), they hope to give the Americans what they expect: the stereotypical Spain of *Carmen* and *Don Juan Tenorio*. During this elaborate rehearsal, villagers dress up as flamenco dancers and bullfighters and erect cardboard sets to cover their dilapidated buildings. The rehearsal thus offers a space for dreaming about the gifts the Americans will bring, and the image they will "buy."

Originally commissioned as a musical within a climate of Francoist censorship,[2] *Bienvenido* slyly alters the genre by decentering its central figure, the singer-actress known as a *folklórica*. Her "star is born" narrative—intrinsic to many musicals—is turned on its head by a surprising emphasis on failure. The film is thus a parody of backstage musical films that follow the staging of a show and, by extension, the evolution of a soon-to-be-star's career. *Bienvenido* superficially incorporates many elements of the backstage musical: the marketing, the preparations, the competition with other aspiring stars (or, in this case, towns) and the corresponding discourse of contests, the creation of a communal song, the rehearsal, the anxiety the night before, and the climactic performance. But it is a shady "business" contract between the town's mayor and Carmen Vargas'

fast-talking agent that provides the idea for the town's self-presentation. And the supposed star, the *folklórica* Carmen Vargas, gets no more attention than the other inhabitants of Villar del Río, while her meek departure from the town at the end of the film provides a counterpoint to the celebratory endings of most star narratives.

Moreover, through its voice-over narration, nondiegetic sound and music, conspicuous editing, mise-en-scène, freeze-frames, and dream sequences, *Bienvenido* subverts the conventions of transparency and fluidity, so common to Andalusian musical films, distancing itself from this genre by referencing several other filmic traditions. These disjunctive techniques invite extrafilmic—and in some scenes intradiegetic—viewers to reflect upon the construction and process of spectatorship. Rather than dwelling on the role of the star and other familiar conventions that fluidly suture spectator identification, the film's language encourages awareness of the constructed links between stereotypical tourist settings of Spain and stardom musicals, thereby offering a powerful ludic illustration of how Spaniards themselves have internalized and reproduced such visions. Woven into the scenes of the preparations, and a silent companion to the delusive dreams of the characters, is an ideological critique of the star narratives and their message that if one works hard enough—if the town puts on a good show, according to Manolo's advice—they will be awarded American dollars. Tragicomically—and herein lies the brilliance of Berlanga's wit—the town's performance ends in disaster. Carmen Vargas neither seduces the Americans, who speed through the town without stopping, nor delivers on her promise to remain in the town if the plan doesn't work. In the end, the town's passionate if disingenuous "investment" in this spectacular production is not worth the paper streamers that decorated it.

This collective travesty allows Berlanga to parody the formal and ideological conventions of the *españolada* and its musical film antecedents, but also to comment critically on the role of fantasy when produced within a social context outside of Hollywood and almost outside of capitalism, yet nevertheless mediated by these forces. Ultimately, *Bienvenido* demonstrates that fantasy constitutes an important part of reality, even when that reality is mere pretending. The build-up to the rehearsal and the actual performance occupies the majority of filmic time, indicating that reality inheres in the far-flung dreams and deep-seated desires of dressing up, which was more real to the villagers than the actual arrival of the Americans would have been. While *Bienvenido* might support the cynical view that dreams are spaces for living out imaginary realities, it nevertheless provides one of Spanish cinema's most cogent testimonies to the endurance of those fantasies. As the film's ambivalent ending suggests,

the citizens of Villar del Río and viewers of the film will resume their normal lives, and will dream their golden dreams.

Ironically, Spain's struggle to become visually modern unfolded in an array of "timeless" Andalusian film stereotypes that were then marketed for both national and international consumption. Terenci Moix has written of "the dictatorship of staged Andalusianism," which he explains in the following terms:

> [. . .] starting from a certain point in time, everything Gypsy was identified with everything Andalusian and everything Andalusian with everything Spanish. All of which gave rise to the verb "to Spanishize" (that is, to spread throughout the world, and particularly throughout Latin America, the reputation and good name of Spain). (19)

The history of Spanish cinema is steeped in depictions of Andalusia, owing partly to nineteenth-century foreign travel writers, but also to Spaniards themselves. Immediately following the 1936–1939 Civil War, the Spanish film industry's biggest product and highest-selling films consisted of popular melodramas, comedies or Andalusian musicals that incorporated narratives of stardom into the *españolada* formula, thereby producing a bizarre mix of modernity and folklore. These films and their generic variants were (as now) invariably condemned as escapist. Weighted down by stereotypes, they melted Andalusia into Spain. The impact of *Bienvenido* derives from this contradictory yet powerful fusion of the rhetoric of stardom and its dream machine with the celebration of backward rural Spain.

The film begins with a frontal shot of an approaching passenger vehicle on a desolate country road. The camera pans 180 degrees, simulating a bystander's rubbernecking. Eschewing the traditional shot-reverse-shot, which would suture the spectator with a particular body, the pan leaves the spectator "in limbo," forcing him or her to rely on his or her own faculties of interpretation (Richardson). Just as important, however, is the foreshadowing of the film's climactic moment in which the townspeople of Villar del Río will be literally left in the dust as the Americans race through town without stopping. The recurring motif of being left behind characterizes the contradictory nature of modernity in Francoist Spain: modernity had arrived, yet Spain had missed out on modernization and its advantages.[3]

Following upon this establishing shot is a parodic "traveling," tour-guide voice that echoes the development of an Andalusia rooted in foreign travel writing. This omniscient voice-over by the well-known

actor Fernando Rey strains to create a picturesque portrait, packaging Spanish village life in a fairy tale language: "Once upon a time there was a little Spanish town, just like any other town." This disembodied voice interrupts and contradicts itself, however, "enticing the viewer" to see the limitations of this "hierarchy of knowledge" designed to "script the viewer's interpretation(s)" (Rolph 15). Insisting on the lack of anything special about the town, he controls our view of the plaza, removing the characters from the mise-en-scène ("Pardon, that way there is less bother") and continuing with his description of the empty plaza. Then, freezing the action, he gives us an abrupt snapshot enhanced by a jolting unharmonious xylophonic trill. These humorous techniques distance us from this mock tour and strengthen the effect of the parody. Like the attempted authentication of Spain by ethnographic photography and the romantic magazine illustrations of the late nineteenth-century (continuing well into the twentieth) the freeze-frames, in their attempt to authenticate the scene, emphasize the absurdity of representing the "soul" of the Spanish nation as being located in anything so reductive as a rural town.

Obligingly, almost lovingly, the narrator pauses on his tour to give us better views of the plaza, the fountain, the church, the town hall with its broken clock, the school with its outdated maps, and finally the "typical" humble dwelling of an Everyman, "probably called Juan." But the narrator's authoritative description of this quaint Spanish town collapses under the weight of inaccurate historical details—"the church dates from exactly thirteen hundred . . . in any case, it is very old"—in a caricature of the hordes of uninformed travel guides who ply tourists with their nonsense. This earnest if clumsy monumentalizing of Villar del Río contrasts with the town's glaring state of abandon and its obscure existence, heightening the film's "mockumentary" style. Feigning innocence and objectivity, the narrator makes the viewer privy to the villagers' idiosyncrasies. Following the town's morning rituals, he passes from one character to another, organically linking the bus driver/delivery man who unloads the latest western film with Don Pablo, an *españolada* fan and mayor in his spare time who receives Carmen and Manolo as they step off the bus. But we notice that the narrator's grand introduction of "the greatest star of Spanish song" gets no more attention than Juan and Rafael, who are working in the fields but still receive equal mention. A metaphor for Spain, as we will see, Villar del Río is not the object of derision, for the film's tone is sympathetic to the plight of oppressed working-class Spaniards and their victimization by government and the wealthy. The attack is rather aimed at the representations of the Spanish village in *españoladas*; buttressed by the ideology of liberal individualism,

these constructed *españolada* locales facilitate the spectator's identification with the *folklórica* star, affirming the individual over the collective.

Berlanga's parody of the *españolada* lies partly in the historical context of the *folklórica* figure. The *folklórica*, the star of the Andalusian musical comedy film, was a female performance artist whose repertoire included a range of flamenco-influenced *canción española*, or Spanish song, regardless of her own regional origin. For many critics, *folklóricas* and their films reduced an "authentic" Spain to an Andalusian commodity. The question of the *españolada*, and by extension, the *folklórica*, polarized the film industry, intellectuals, and everyone else who saw cinema as responsible for narrating the nation. This "worthless" genre nevertheless defined the film market for several decades. *Bienvenido*, then, is a parodic performance that critically reenacts the established conventions of the Andalusian musical comedy film.

Yet it also incorporates some of the more progressive roots of this genre, at the very moment when those original features were being coopted by a Francoist-friendly film industry that sought a nostalgic and uncritical recuperation of the past. The *folklórica* figure had emerged from the bawdy, subversive late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century popular theatre and the contestatory and humorous *sainete*. Even during the 1940s, the *folklórica* embodied contradictory discourses, celebrating independent female stardom, while reinforcing religious and conservative views complicit with Francoism.[4] Thus the ambivalence of *Bienvenido*, which attacks the profit-motivated, massified *españoladas* while it subtly acknowledges its forgotten generic conventions through its cutting humor and its privileging of popular common sense as opposed to the maxims of political and entertainment industry charlatans.

Berlanga's cinematic formation at the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC) is crucial to understanding *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* The IIEC provided the impetus for "the decade's cinematic innovation as well as the focal point for a more generalized cultural and political dissidence" (Kathleen Vernon, "Culture and Cinema," 255). Berlanga's training gave him access to classic foreign films of German expressionism, Soviet montage, French poetic realism, and Italian neorealism, most of which were unavailable to the general public in Spain at that time (255). Berlanga's heterogeneous film education therefore coincided with the mature form of the Andalusian musical comedy film, which was displaying the symptoms of self-parody and reflexivity proper to a genre that had become highly aware of itself. A new generation of *folklóricas* (notably Lola Flores, Paquita Rico, and Carmen Sevilla) had emerged in full Technicolor, displaying a bolder sensuality and more suggestive clothing.

Bienvenido was intended as a star vehicle to promote the budding flamenco singer and budding *folklórica*, Lola Sevilla, who plays Car-

men Vargas, the film's *folklórica*. Originally scheduled for four musical numbers, Berlanga's parody of an almost pre-modern Spain dressing up as the setting for a folkloric musical undercuts the figure of Carmen Vargas, the "Songbird of Southern Spain," by privileging the *image* of Carmen (actually Lola) at the expense of her voice. Carmen's arrival is featured as just another happening in the town, and it is only due to Manolo's inside dealings with the mayor that folklore can "capture" the citizens' imagination sufficiently to provoke their collective, almost ritual mobilization to put on their show. Historically, even the most remote towns in Spain hosted travelling *folklóricas* in their taverns, just as many of the films these actresses starred in were screened in their schools and plazas. The inhabitants of Villar del Río are in fact overly familiar with the *folklórica* image, and feel no passion for Carmen's presence. She has barely a line of speech in the entire movie, its dialogue consisting of cocky monosyllabic Andalusian expressions. Carmen is finally more a prop than a star, and her performances in the bar draw only lukewarm applause. In the dressing-room scene (a staple in backstage musicals), Manolo instructs her to "let the men do the talking," reasserting the sexist paradigms of the entertainment world while putting on a show for the mayor, who eagerly kisses Carmen on the cheek before leaving to complete his "business" with Manolo.

The narrative of stardom in Andalusian musical comedy films oftentimes requires the *folklórica* to achieve success in foreign capitals—Paris, New York City, Buenos Aires—and then return to Spain, forever changed by her contact with world commerce, yet still recognizeable to Spanish audiences. In *Bienvenido*, this trajectory from the margins to the center of modernity, which validates the Spaniard-as-commodity, is reversed by Carmen Vargas' travels to Villar del Río, the antonym of the global capital. Instead of being sutured into the adoring looks of the intradiegetic spectators, the extradiegetic viewer is here encouraged to focus on the town itself as star. Lifted by its communal fantasy, the forgotten village of Villar del Río emerges from the normative role that would script it as a crowd and begins instead to experience the exhilarating rise to stardom that ordinarily is reserved for the *folklórica*.

Viewed from a high angle shot of Villar del Río's rooftops, everything seems to be running as usual (except the town's clock), when an alarm sounds ominously and persistently. With the memory of bombing raids perhaps still lurking in the minds of the extradiegetic audience, the sleepy town's violent awakening is powerful for both its humor and its oblique reference to a past reality. Washerwomen, cows, and old men on a stoop are jolted into action by a motorcade of official vehicles that roars into the central plaza and empties out a line of black-suited government bureaucrats. This town is unaccustomed to news, or anything new, so wild

speculations spread in chain reaction, conveyed by the comic-suspenseful music and the increasingly rapid editing that reflects the excited guesses of what this invasion of government delegates could mean. The predictions of the citizens arise from their material reality: war, lack of education, and a barren agrarian economy. The distortion of reality in order to control it is a major theme in the film. By disrupting the flow of language and dialogue, the film flaunts the constructedness of language as a seamless system of meaning.[5]

The exaggerated predictions lead to a linking sequence in which adults instruct children to tell the delegate that the crops have been bad, while the camera cuts to the mayor who, oblivious of the commotion, is showing Manolo and Carmen his possessions and boasting of good crop yields. This juxtaposition begins an increasingly rapid cross-cutting and splicing of dialogue that involves stopping a shot on a particular word of a character's speech, then beginning a new shot in which a new character uses the same word, but in an entirely different way. This word artifice is evocative of the *sainete*, a short theatrical form with subversive humor and language from which Miguel Mihura, the scriptwriter of *Bienvenido*, often borrowed. The result is a humorous volley of unintended meanings, a playful parody of the Hegelian thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The priest asks his faithful, "Who *are* these Americans?" Cut to the town aristocrat, Don Luis: "Indians!" Then he continues his tirade about the Yankees—"who *are* these Americans?" Cut to Eloisa, the schoolteacher, describing "the inhabitants of the United States and the largest producers of" . . . (cut to the priest) . . . "of sins and the largest producers of Protestants." So, the priest asks, "What are the Americans going to give us?" Cut to an official Francoist NO-DO newsreel (Noticiario y Documentales) where an American official is promising that the Marshall Plan will bring "more things for more towns much faster" and explaining how France and Italy have already received aid.[6] In this elaborate chain sequence, each character represents one of the Ideological State Apparatuses—the church, the landowning aristocracy, the school, and a film industry permeated by American presence. Distancing the image from the spectator, the gaps in meaning invite an incisive critique of these institutions that, for whatever reason, manipulate images of individuals, regions, and the Spanish nation.

Berlanga has employed chaotic montage sequences to express the cacophony of competing interests that seek to win the opinion of the citizens. Oversaturated with new information and faced with having to sort through radically diverging opinions of the identity, interests, and charity of the Americans, the citizens go to bed that night full of confusion. It is here, prior to decision-making or action, that the fast-talking

agent, clever Manolo, another *españolada* convention, takes advantage of the moment to convince the mayor that Villar del Río should expand the performance of Carmen into a full-fledged collective Andalusian spectacle including the whole town. The town's big decision as to how to represent itself becomes a contest: which ideological interest will prevail? Ultimately, the decision—which could determine prosperity or devastation—is made behind closed doors.

The year following the release of *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* Spain and the United States signed the 1953 Defense Pacts, which allowed the United States to establish military bases on Spanish territory. Berlanga was certainly aware of the government's plans to accept the dubious honor of becoming a target, given the likelihood of preliminary talks foreshadowing the agreement. Villar del Río becomes, in effect, Spain's entrance hall to the stage of the world economy. Haunting many Spaniards since the so-called disaster of 1898, followed by a devastating Civil War and its regressive aftermath, has been the sense of a not-so, or not-quite modern Spain. *Bienvenido*'s Villar del Río embodies this precarious state of uneven modernity, its liminality foregrounded by characters perched before windows, balconies, and doorframes and dreams. Peering through such spaces, they imagine a potential economic prosperity, rehearsing a modernity that they do not fully inhabit.

When the delegate arrives to assess what Villar del Río has done to prepare their welcome, he beseeches the mayor to dress up the town—make it the way the Americans want, and beat out the other towns in the area. Invoking the discourse of the contest, each town strives to out-do the rest but, true to Berlanga's black humor, none will win. Telling the mayor to imagine his intended audience, he leads him to the balcony of the town hall to survey the town. But like the contents of a faded store display, the town has only the same old run-down buildings, broken clock, dripping fountain—a worthless and abandoned detritus. The delegate, a Francoist technocrat who supports dictatorship while espousing capitalist development, sees the town as nothing more than its value in the eyes of the Americans, who represent capitalism. Delegate: "What will the Americans say when they see this? What impression will they take back with them?" The mayor, a parody of the landowning class, responds, "Ah, so the Americans are going to take something with them? Because I thought the opposite."

Each character has a stake in how this drama will unfold; each one in his own way will try to influence how the town gets sold to the Americans, or will address the more pressing issue of how they can sell the Americans to the townsfolk. The delegate appeals to the mayor's sense of pride: "Other towns of the province have constructed archways

with flowers; they've whitewashed their houses, and even put hangings on their poor fountains, converting them into magnificent luminescent fountains!" The emphasis on the town's physical features as metaphors of economic and cultural ones signals a prelude to the economic boom that would commence at the end of the decade and reach its pinnacle in the 1960s.

At the delegate's departure, the mayor leans on the balcony overlooking the plaza and slyly starts whistling a song, letting us know he has another plan. At that moment the plaza-stage begins to fill with townsfolk-actors dressed in flamenco costume. A quasi medieval-looking horn introduces the mayor's drone of addled tautologies impersonally addressed to his subjects. In a later short, *El sueño de la maestra* (*The Schoolteacher's Dream*, 2002), Berlanga would vindicate the censorship of the schoolteacher's dream from the 1952 film by incorporating actual footage from one of Franco's famous speeches from a balcony; and in *Bienvenido*, Pepe Isbert's speech as the mayor hilariously mirrors the Caudillo's gestures and discourse. But here, the memory of Franco's speeches will be desecrated, for Manolo accompanies the mayor—politics and entertainment stand united—impatiently interrupting his repetitive and incoherent discourse. Because Manolo understands audiences, something we saw in an earlier dressing room scene typical of the backstage musical, he tries to save the speech. Their struggle to control turns into a comedy act as Manolo holds up the speech to tell the citizens to rearrange their hats and hairpieces. These comic turns make clear that politics is all a farce, a performance.

Since no one seems quite sure what is expected of them, Manolo delivers a pep talk that resonates with the Spanishization that Terenci Moix (19) had described: "I'm telling you that Spain is known in America because of (through) Andalusia." Their noble town should be proud of such a role! "It's just that the fame of our bullfights, our bullfighters, our Gypsies, and above all our song, (pan down to a high angle view of a sea of Andalusian hats) has erased the fame of everything else and looks to us for folklore." A master rhetorician, Manolo conflates all of Andalusia with the tiny Villar del Río and caps his speech with the profit the citizens will realize if they "buy" into Manolo's plans to front the costumes and decorations. For what Villar del Río "invests" in his charade, the Americans will repay them, with more left over. To such crafty masterminds as these, the plan seems workable, for like many charismatic politicians and itinerant salesmen, Manolo has a knack for convincing people of his future successes by boasting of exaggerated former business exploits. Through the figure of the con-artist, who insists on American-style business, Berlanga mocks capitalist poseurs in a society where full-fledged commodity capitalism has yet to be born.

Nevertheless, the film resists interpretation through devices that erode total control by any one authority, whether it be Manolo and Don Pablo, the Americans, the Spanish delegates, the school, or the church. As in other Berlanga films, the village population appears in key episodes as an audience or a crowd, but is never unconditionally passive. Before the Americans arrive, the villagers listen to the priest Don Cosme debate Señorita Eloísa, the schoolmistress, on the vices and virtues of America. They gather in the village cinema to get the "official" line from the state newsreel shown before every film. They gather in the barbershop and general goods store to gossip, and they participate in the dress rehearsal. Afterwards, they line up in the town square to request presents from the Americans. In each case they structure and necessitate village leadership. Winning over the population, securing its consent, remains a central concern for both civic and religious authorities, who naturally—tellingly—dismiss its fundamental importance.

But who are the actors in this pre-capitalist drama, and who are the spectators? The vertical pans between the audience and Manolo and the mayor destabilize any unidirectional gaze and blur the difference between who is spectating and who is being spectated. By breaking down the visual hierarchy, the scene comments on the constructed nature of performance, refusing to take the side of either the audience or the speakers. Neither Manolo nor the mayor escapes derision, while the townsfolk appear both skeptical and convinced.

When the preparations begin in earnest, the town's clock is fixed by placing a mule behind its face to turn the dial, and the schoolteacher must identify the folkloric items of clothing people are wearing because no one has ever heard what a lady's comb is actually called. Covering their buildings with cardboard sets and street signs and posts identical to those used in *españolada* filmic recreations of Andalusian towns, the workers exit the frame to be replaced by "an Andalusian gentleman strumming a guitar beneath the dimming on-set lights. Suddenly the self-signaling movie-set upon a movie-set begins to function as a believable Andalusian world. The spectator is taken by surprise, suddenly transported from critical distance into the escapism of last week's *españolada*" (Richardson).

Ultimately, the rehearsal looks remarkably like an *españolada*—indeed, it becomes more real than the performance. One might think the performance had already started, that it is already the next day, when the Americans are supposed to arrive. Children run through the streets, the band plays, and the town's delivery truck is draped in flags, making it look like part of the Americans' motorcade. Not surprisingly, Manolo plays Mr. Marshall himself—the similarity to FDR is also remarkable—greeting the pretend representatives of the town, and all together they merrily

make their way down the main street. Manolo steps from the village bus (the official limousine), shakes hands with the mayor, kisses Carmen, and makes a "V" sign to the welcoming crowds. His performance looks like a faked newsreel broadcast, but since it has no original—Manolo is simulating an event that has yet to take place—this rehearsal becomes the real "original," recorded by cinema. The dress rehearsal thus becomes more real than the event it mimics, and the professional Andalusian becomes for a moment a professional North American without losing any of his distinctive "Spanish" qualities. Here again, Spain is known to the Americans through Andalusia, and both of these acts undermine the concept of the "original." The spectacular parade up the village streets unites stardom, mimicry, and national identity in a complex masque, where presence and absence alternate in a euphoric mix of commodities, consumers, politics, and spectacle.

At the dress rehearsal the *folklórica* and the population join in singing the film's central song. The population—energized by this collective act in communal space—begins to share the direction of the show, hitherto led by the village leadership. Here as elsewhere, popular consumption of culture ceases to be passive and becomes pivotal to the cultural swing between the two nations that constitute the heart of the film. Indeed, the social dynamic of this event exceeds mere commerce. The music is sung by Carmen Vargas and backed by the whole town, illustrating the communal quality of the creative process. Improvisation, nonprofessional acting, communal participation, and the idea of popular song transmitted through the oral tradition create the impression of a folkloric culture involved in the mechanical reproduction of song for a mass audience. In this nostalgic discourse, a preindustrial culture engages—musically—with the dominant hegemonic power and then mimics the packaging of musical films.

The song the town rehearses is the film's celebrated musical score, *Copliyas de las divisas* (written by José Antonio Ochaita and Xandro Valerio, and composed by Juan Solano). It is improvised and composed on-screen by Manolo and Don Pablo when they go to the capital to pick up the costumes for this collective show. The song's lyrics parody Spanish caricatures of America with its promise of consumer commodities phrased in the argot of Andalusia. Berlanga's orientalizing of Andalusia—dressing up Villar del Río as a caricature of what foreigners expect—parallels an equally disruptive reification of America in terms of its mass culture and commodification, and even more pressingly, its notions of progress and individualism. Reduced to products, "America" suffers a withering critique as the movie's theme tune collapses refrigerators and skyscrapers in a comic and surreal incongruity:

> The Yankees have come
> —Hip, hip hooray—with a thousand gifts
> and they'll regale the pretty girls with aeroplanes,
> with jet-propelled aeroplanes
> that slice the air
> and skyscrapers too, well preserved
> in the refrigerator.

Aligned with the film's modus operandi of dark humor, the lyric's absurdity reminds us of the confusion produced by the imposition of commodity capitalism onto an uneven economic system. But they also parody some of the gratuitous and superficial, yet catchy, songs that many Spanish musical films had cranked out.

Indeed, the theme tune became a well-known jingle with Spanish film audiences of the time and even today remains "the *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* song." Agustín Tena (94–95) describes its commodification and sedimentation, and subsequent transformation, in the Spanish popular imaginary:

> Commercial *spots* have been made, with the royalties going to the musical authors José Antonio Ochaita, Xandro Valerio, and Juan Solano, who are still reaping rich rewards from the General Society of Authors; all of us know by heart the words "Americanos, os recibimos con alegría"—which, in truth, do not figure in the lyrics, at least in so far as word order is concerned—forever citing the music as a *pasodoble* when in reality it is a *pasacalles* . . .[7]

Deconstructing the myth-making apparatus of Hollywood and mass Spanish folklore, *Bienvenido* shows how the oral transmission of popular culture can also be distorted and reified through radio and film—the modern forms of oral tradition. The film exposes the way in which commodified Andalusian spectacle in the form of folkloric musical comedy films masquerades as "authentic" folk ritual. It underscores how in this era ritualized collective performance must draw upon the logic of capitalism and its spectacular imagery of consumerism and advertising. According to the concept of reification, under capitalism, the commodity form penetrates people's lives to the extent that individuals can neither fully imagine noncommodified social relations nor think outside of the logic of capital. The citizens of Villar del Río are consistently treated as consumers, advertisers, or commodities through the "enlightened" town leaders' attempts to "sell" versions of Andalusianness or Americanness. For the villagers to be valuable to the Americans, then they must present

themselves as commodities—commodities that ironically invoke the most extreme form of localism. Once again the film emphasizes the tragicomedy of a village that has not experienced full-fledged commodity capitalism but nevertheless tries to cloak their lived reality in a fake Andalusian experience in order to appear more authentic, more valuable as a commodity.

The film's central sequence of reification is when the villagers of Villar del Río line up before the civic and ecclesiastic authorities in the village square to list the things they want from the American visitors. What they ask for, of course, are commodities. They can only ask for one thing, so most ask for a sewing machine or a bicycle "with a bell!" (a pointed reference to the neorealist film, *The Bicycle Thief*). But we are also struck by the modesty of some of the villagers' requests—a sack of grain or a pair of donkeys—that reveal their inability to articulate desires for full-fledged commodities. The narrator sympathizes: it's difficult to choose just one thing, and, to be fair, everyone must get something. The wink here at Spain's experience of democratic socialism under the Republic is undeniable, and Berlanga doesn't let anyone off the hook. Good intentions abound, but the promises do not deliver. Playing on the Marxist mantra, from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs, the narrator tells us about a poor farmer who spends all day looking up at the clouds and then asks for a set of weights.

But how, indeed, is one to be aware of such needs without capitalism telling, or advertising, what those needs are? Don Luis, the town's impoverished but proud aristocrat, resists capitalism by refusing to ask for anything, clutching his feudal dreams. Yet "who knows, maybe he does ask for something," the narrator reflects. To be modern without actually occupying a place within commodity capitalism means to stage a commodity spectacle without capital: the town's "capital" is as ephemeral as the cardboard that forms its Andalusian false front. Modernity, for them, is like a musical. One sells oneself as a commodity even when one can't afford commodities, when one's culture stands poised before global capitalism without taking the plunge. In Berlanga's dark humor, characters know nothing of spectacular commodity capitalism, and are not immersed in the logic of commodity fetishism, even though they are certainly not immune to its far-flung effects. Inserted into an artificial situation that simulates commodity capitalism, they are simply bewildered, and unable to articulate their experience. The film's portrayal of what they want is thus a key moment. Undefined as yet by objects ("my desire is structured by the object I desire") and unsure of what they want, they unwittingly refuse to be reified. Knowingly or not, freedom is what the characters ask for. Precisely at the point when the villagers talk about "objects," they become subjects.

The desired advent of American dollars in Villar del Río provokes a fantasized modernity, which enters the villagers' dreams the night before the supposed arrival of the Americans. *Bienvenido*'s famous dream sequences—reminiscent of the dream sequences in other musical films—begins with the narrator's cue, "Now is the moment at which everything that has been felt, secretly desired at some point, suddenly comes out." If fantasy is the mise-en-scène of desire, then this is certainly one of film history's favored moments.

Through four dream sequences, in which representative members of the community fantasize about the Americans' visit, *Bienvenido* inverts the ideological influence of U.S. cultural imperialism, demonstrating that Villar del Río's citizen-spectators do not consume unconditionally the American movies fed to them. Don Pablo's dream is exemplary: in his imagination he performs as the cowboy/sheriff star of his preferred film genre, the Western. Emily Apter has written that the fetish object, form, or event "is also 'personalized' in the sense that beyond its status as a collective social object it evokes an intensely personal response from individuals" (3). Don Pablo's passionate relationship with the content of his fantasy life is incommensurate, however, with existing social values. Eloisa the schoolteacher would never fawn over him, or dress like a cabaret dancer in a Western saloon, for that matter. His friendly business partnership with Manolo would never descend into a bar brawl, and most importantly, the town does not see Don Pablo as a tough cowboy character. For Apter, however, it is in just such "disavowals" and flights from reality that a possibility is opened for "both the formation and the revelation of ideology and value consciousness" (3). Don Pablo, like the other characters, inserts himself into a generic fetish event by dreaming, but his original anxieties and desires don't change. The form of the fantasy might be a Western or a historical epic, but the content remains the same: the competition between Manolo and the mayor, and the mayor's desire for Eloísa and Carmen Vargas. The fantasy thus provides a mise-en-scène for the expression of Don Pablo's desire. Unconsciously, he utilizes the fetish form for his own purposes, even though his dream remains a dream.

The final words of the narrator expose the ephemeral nature of performance and representation and their place within memory and history:

> All that remains is to clear up this stage assembly: the false flowers, false suits, the false walls and the false hats of the false Andalusians. To sum up, those swift Americans have passed and that is all; no influence, no memories. Well hey! Everything

> goes back to its place in the order of things, everything is already forgotten.

Just prior to this epilogue, the U.S. dignitaries have swept through the village in limousines without stopping, leaving the townsfolk shrouded in a cloud of dust. Pepito, the favored pupil of Señorita Eloísa chosen to read the statement welcoming the Americans, is left with his words hanging in the wind. The *cordobés* hats of Don Pablo and Manolo are suspended in mid-air. The band starts up and then stops, then starts again before fading away definitively. The rapid and violent passage of the North Americans through Villar del Río makes them practically invisible, or at least no more substantial than the images projected from cinema screens. They remain incorporeal, and their imitators (such as Manolo Morán) prove more real than the originals.

Ultimately, stardom is just as ephemeral as the capitalist dream. And aspiring to capitalism—borrowing money for costumes and props when the town produces no capital of its own—leaves the town more lacking in material goods than before. Feeling guilty, Manolo helps the town with its debt by offering the ring that the Americans supposedly gave him in Boston where he had at one time traveled to promote Carmen Vargas. Breaking their contract to work for free for five months if the spectacle fails, the dreammakers of Andalusian spectacle then depart in the village bus.

Throughout the course of the film, the "true" reality of Villar del Río, the decrepit residue of Imperial Spain, has been exchanged for the less threatening and thus more exotic view of Spain. However, the film complicates this process of commodification by enacting an Andalusian spectacle, including its rehearsal and "backstage" labor, activities. Because the actual production of a backstage musical film requires some form of capitalist modernity, *Bienvenido*'s knock-off is but a shabby parody of Andalusian spectacle, which in turn parodies Andalusia. The film reworks the stereotype, giving new meaning to the collective performance and revealing a more complex material reality of Spain. The town's cultural and economic poverty could not be disguised—and dispelled—in quite the same mysterious way as the North American visitors themselves.[8]

The narrator's final intervention, "colorín colorado, este cuento se ha acabado," closes the film's faux fairy tale framework. As the narrator had previously noted, no one *really* believes in the Three Wise Men—or *españoladas*, for that matter. Perhaps Berlanga was bracing himself against accusations that the film portrayed corrupt government officials bankrupting a town for the sake of a stereotypical show for the Americans. By this point in the movie, however, the spectator realizes that any meaning is

saturated with parody. Accordingly, we should forget neither the foolishness of the starstruck mayor nor the collective and individual instances of creative manipulation of cinematic convention to shape fantasy, even when shoveled out in the form of the *españolada*. And due to its singular place among both domestic and foreign film histories, *Bienvenido* has not been forgotten. In the cultural memory of Spain, *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* was a groundbreaking moment in which spectatorship was demonstrably negotiated, just as the interpellation of Spaniards as Andalusian was to become even more pervasive through the medium of television. Nonetheless, as *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* suggests, such interpellation opens itself to popular resignification.

Notes

1. The ERP provided more than $13 billion dollars in U.S. aid (today this would be equivalent to $90 billion) to some seventeen European nations. By the end of 1951, in response to the perceived threat of Communism and the impact of the Korean War, the Marshall Plan shifted its focus to European security and military issues.

2. According to Peter Besas, because of the warm reception of *Esa pareja feliz* by film professionals at Madrid's Cine Pompeya, "Bardem and Berlanga were contracted—through Ricardo Muñoz Suay—by the recently established production company UNINCI [Unión Industrial Cinematográfica, SA] to make a film that could be set in Andalusia and star Lolita Sevilla. The filmmakers came up with two treatments, one dramatic and one comic. A *Time* article about Coca-Cola provided the crux of the story; other influences came from *Passport to Pimlico* and *La kermesse héroïque*. The film was *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall* (*Welcome Mr. Marshall*)" (35). It should be noted that UNINCI, along with the national film school where Berlanga had studied, the IIEC, were part of a regenerative impulse within the Spanish film industry.

3. Nathan Richardson writes: "America, in short, becomes here a kind of shorthand for Modernity, a movement in which Spaniards, through their dictator, have been culturally complicit (already converted into commodities) while reaping few of its material benefits."

4. Various studies have analyzed this discrepancy: Labanyi, Vernon, Ballesteros, Woods, etc.

5. Both Rolph and Richardson make reference to the breakdown of language in the film, noting how no one can remember Villar del Río's name, the mayor's "deafness," and the Dada-esque imitations of Americans during the dream sequences.

6. Here Berlanga had taken a NO-DO, which included footage of one of the more than 250 films that were made by the Marshall Plan's Motion Picture Section and by the Documentary Film Unit of the U.S. Office of Military Government after World War II. During the writing of this article, fourteen archival copies of these films, made between 1948 and 1953, are being given a public showcase in the United States for the first time. In 1948 a law was passed to prohibit the

propagandizing of U.S. citizens. Senator John Kerry introduced legislation in 1990 to overturn this ban.

7. The *pasacalles* was a musical form of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that consisted of a slow three-four measure, with continuous variations on a ground bass, and that tended to be played while passing through the streets. It has been compared to the *chaconne*.

8. Richardson states this somewhat differently: "Sustaining 'authentic' identities against encroaching global cultural forces requires economic capital. And while the film's fairytale conclusion [. . .] affirms the right of all to keep dreaming, the fact remains that Villar del Río still lacks a railroad—the means for the common citizens to move beyond their community and do more than imagine themselves in other possible communities."

2

Existential Crossroads in *Muerte de un ciclista* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955)

Andrés Lema-Hincapié

Introduction

By the 1950s existentialism had spread throughout Western Europe. In 1942, Norberto Bobbio described it as a philosophy of crisis, of the historical moment, and even as "a spiritual attitude" (13–14). This philosophy is generally understood as an anthropology structured around moral axes, one that uses the methods of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology to explore psychologically the human condition. Not surprisingly, in Spain, national Catholicism rejected these new ideas. In his 1950 article "Presencia y ausencia del existencialismo en España" ("Presence and Absence of Existentialism in Spain"), Julián Marías does not mention the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Nevertheless, in mid-century Spain the basic writings of these authors circulated among intellectuals, either in the original version or in Spanish translations.

As Frederick Copleston wrote, "existentialism is an attempt to philosophize from the standpoint of the actor rather than from that of the spectator" (129). Here I will be arguing that in *Muerte de un ciclista* (*Death of a Cyclist*, 1955), Juan Antonio Bardem philosophizes in existentialist idiom from the perspective of the actor, both in the original motion picture script and the film. I will use certain key concepts of existentialism to

Fig. 2. Lucía Bosé as María José and Alberto Closas as Juan in *Muerte de un ciclista*. Courtesy of Video Mercury Films, S.A.U.

inscribe Bardem's work[1] in the intellectual coordinates of the historical period, and also to explore his thematic and cinematographic statements, although there is no one-to-one correspondence between the film and the thought of Sartre and Camus. According to Juan Francisco Cerón Gómez, although Bardem was not particularly attracted to these thinkers, he was familiar with their writings, and at one point in his career he wanted to adapt Alfonso Sastre's *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (*Death Squad*, 1953), a play with undeniable existentialist resonance (Cerón e-mail). Instead of resuscitating what Roland Barthes called "the myth of filiation" ("From Work to Text" 77), where Bardem's film and script would appear as existentialism's offspring, I prefer to destabilize the notion of influence, thinking through parallels and challenging contrasts between the Spanish director's work and the French philosophical movement.

Up to the present, critics of *Muerte de un ciclista* have favored political, historical, and social readings. For Claude Souef, the film is "an accusation against a class in ruins" (139). According to Marcel Oms (*Juan Bardem* 52), although *Muerte de un ciclista* would form part of a "alienation trilogy" together with *Calle Mayor* (*Main Street*, 1956) and *La venganza* (*Vengeance*, 1957), and in spite of the fact that the theme of human alienation appears "in the social context of Francoism" (52), the film is rather a parable where the psychological is finally diluted in the symbolic treatment of the characters (19). For L. G. Egido, *Muerte de un ciclista* denounces "a politically defined historical reality" (12), and

rather than an attack against military and ecclesiastical institutions, the film's content is "just as political as social, and just as or more historical than political" (60). From this point of view, Egido also affirms that *Muerte de un ciclista* "is the most complete political, social, and historical cinematic reflection upon the Civil War and its consequences, to which a moral dimension is added" (61).[2]

For the purposes of my argument, I want to recover this "moral dimension" or anthropology of an existential tenor to which Egido refers, which is also justified by Cerón Gómez's transcription of Bardem's notes, where the director emphasizes the moral rather than political nature of the problems treated in his film (124). Cerón alludes suggestively to what he calls the "existentialist echoes" (129) of the protagonist, Juan. Also, the "psychological tension of the characters, who are trapped, she [María José] in her fear, and he [Juan], in his remorse" (Egido 12–13) can be better understood through an existential reading. Lastly, I will refer to Marsha Kinder's insistence on the idea that the "issue of taking responsibility for choices is central to the plot" and that "this theme has existential resonance" (*Blood Cinema* 76).

The Accident: Temporal Discontinuity of Existence

There are three deaths in Bardem's film, and each one can be assigned a different meaning. To begin, the first death (that of the cyclist) can be understood in terms of contingency. This death establishes a *before* and an *after*, introducing temporal discontinuity into bourgeois existence. The second death is that of Juan, who dies as one of those "martyred losers" (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 73) and is elevated to nobility within the sadomasochistic discourse of Franco's Catholicism. The third death, that of María José, surely can be understood as a sign of vindictive Providence—a solution cherished by Francoist censors. The mutilated bodies of the two men are scrupulously and perhaps reverentially excluded from the camera's frame—which may evince a certain respect for the corpse?—and in the case of the cyclist, the viewer never sees in detail the nameless character's face and body (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 74). This highlights a strong contrast with the close visual treatment of the adulterous lovers. In this first moment, the cyclist is no more than a thing, a worldly obstacle, a *being-in-itself*, which is only seen but does not see. In the motion picture script, the word "eso" (that thing) is used three times to refer to the cyclist's dead body (7–9). In contrast, María José is always presented as a *being-for-itself* whose existence is defined by the intensification of her bad conscience. In Sartrean terms, this would

make her dead from the beginning, struck dead by an unredeemable moral death.[3]

The contingency of the first death shatters the security of María José's and Juan's existence, forcing them to confront what Sartre calls their own *situation* or *facticity*—and what Mary Warnock defines as "the particular contingent facts which are true of each one of us" (Warnock 108). In this confrontation with *facticity*, one lives without delay Søren Kierkegaard's *aut . . . aut. . . .* Necessarily, one must decide. But what does one decide? Or, in terms of the Catholic doctrine: whatever decision Juan and María José make will maintain them in sin. Either they violate the fifth commandment (Thou Shalt Not Kill) or they continue to violate the sixth (Thou Shalt Not Fornicate), the eighth (Thou Shalt Not Lie), and the ninth (Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Wife).[4] This is Kierkegaard's *this* or *that*: either they allow a man to die, which would also mean to kill him, or they reveal their fornication, lies, and adultery.

The contrast between the first and second shots of this sequence announces unambiguously the moral confrontation: playful music perhaps representing the mood of the cyclist—a faceless man without moral conflicts—or of the adulterous couple, and a long shot from a static camera that would seem only to announce the naive realism of a calm character. Then comes the first close-up of the faces of the two lovers, a portrait of their torment: "they looked with anguish," according to the script (7). Throughout the entire film, the abundant use of close-ups makes *Muerte de un ciclista* a true exploration in existential anthropology. As we will see, the close-up is the privileged shot for accessing the psychological intimacy of the characters, more so than their words.

The first sequence on the desolate road in autumn perhaps suggests the unlikely nature of the accident, even as one of the motorists who speaks with Encarna, the owner of the hostel, justifies the accident in light of the great amount of traffic on that road. For a few seconds, the undulating terrain hides the anonymous cyclist from view, and the site of the actual collision is only suggested. It is therefore an *uncertain there*, an angle impenetrable to the spectator's gaze—in spite of the fact that the cyclist would prolong the imaginary line that unites the spectator and the screen, and therefore could be "representing" the possible spectator. The event that sets up the drama must be reconstructed imaginatively after a certain crescendo announces an accident that remains highly improbable. Given the road conditions (no obstacles) and good visibility (no rain or heavy fog), as well as the familiarity of the route for the furtive lovers and the cyclist who rides to the Carabanchel foundry every day (Guión 47), the accident has a highly arbitrary, unjustified aspect. More metaphysical than realistic, the accident scene postulates the radical contingency

of the event by introducing chance into the rigorous, homogenous, and insipid causality of daily life. The death of the cyclist makes possible the absolutely unexpected, suspending the securities and necessities of Juan and María José, whose existence now becomes unforeseeable.

In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), Sartre speaks of "the universal contingency of being" (479): everything could be otherwise, nothing is necessary, with respect to both *Being-in-itself* (the world) and *Being-for-itself* (the individual)—what Sartre calls *facticity* (*Being and Nothingness* 327). As a contingent reality of *Being-in-itself*, the dead cyclist or "that thing" stands for absolute contingency. Juan, but not María José, will assume his own existence in accordance with this *facticity*. Everything could be otherwise, in spite of the fact that the individual lives within arbitrary and seemingly unchangeable determinants: his own past, his family, his socioeconomic class. In this sense, Bardem and Sartre share an anthropological optimism in the face of social determinism. There is no longer music in the second shot of this sequence, which is reached through what Cerón calls a "shocking" cut (127). One might think that the disintegration of homogenous causality, deterministic and discrete in the lovers' existences, finds its cinematic expression in Bardem's "dizzying, dry" editing (Cerón 12).

In another sense, the accident is also metaphysical. It is the occasion for reconfiguring existential reality, particularly that of Juan. Later, when Juan speaks with Matilde, a student who is a victim of injustice, he says, "Since a few days ago, since precisely that day, I think a lot about everything" (Guión 103-4). This is the first moment of the existential transformation: *clarity*. The accident forces Juan to take into account the diverse forms of tyranny (the couple, the family, the profession, the social class) and at the same time it destabilizes the three dimensions of his consciousness of time.

"The indispensable point of departure is," writes André Nicolas, "awareness. To become aware is to exist in the existential sense (*ek-sistere*), to come out of, to detach oneself from, no longer submit and, as a consequence, dive into solitude " (2). Camus writes in *Caligula* (1944): "Those we have killed are always with us" (37). The anonymous dead man, the cyclist, is not absent. Just like Camus's Mersault and his victim on the beach in *The Stranger*, the dead cyclist will illuminate Juan, awakening the will to rebellion (Nicolas 32), in contrast with the hypnotic state in which Juan lived before the accident.[5] This is the second moment of the existential transformation: *decision*. Silent gestures suggesting Juan's preparation have already taken place for this transformation—which would allow Kinder to affirm that in the film scene of the theatre Juan begins to detach himself from his role as "spectator-in-the-text" (Kinder, *Blood*

Cinema 78). Turning himself into the police represents the recovery of his authentic existence, as Juan affirms: "We're going to be masters of our destiny" (Guión 115). As Oms's writes: "But there is the trampled cyclist. A death that has awakened in him [Juan] the moral rectitude of his youth" (18). And in Cerón's words: "In Bardem's film, what you have is an accidental death that provokes a moral crisis in the protagonist, with political implications" (131). At the same time, the death of the cyclist confirms María José's conformity. She does not open her facticity to new possibilities. Fear leads her to intensify her alienation in the egoism of comfort.[6]

Finally, by murdering Juan, she moves beyond the only form of transgression hitherto permitted by her conscience, adultery, and she commits the final transgression: murder. Her consciousness only transgresses in order to deepen her alienated existence. Rafa, María José, Juan, Miguel, and the other members of the bourgeoisie captured by Bardem share the passivity of their privileged situation instead of taking responsibility for their actions.

Upon Juan's becoming aware of his condition, the past will reappear with a clear meaning for him. In the first place, the war has no *what for*. Long gone are the days when Juan could suffer with irony his mother's reproaches for not having brought honor to the family with a military career. And in the second place, he is estranged both from the family and from religion. Instead of confession, which in some sense reconciles the present of a Catholic with his sinful past, Juan prefers to meet with an old comrade, the Entrenador. This sequence, shot with a static camera in the dark church where the funeral rites take place, contrasts with the exterior sequence built with traveling shots and abundant light, where simple costumes prevail in an open atmosphere.

JUAN: We've almost always run with carrying a rifle.

COACH: Someone said that it was the ideal accessory.

JUAN: Yes, but he didn't say what for, did he? (Guión 102)

By way of Juan's existential decision, the present will be redeemed of its monotony and of the weight of tradition. In Martin Heidegger's terms, Juan's present will no longer be tyrannized by the principle of idle talk, which reads as follows: "Things are so because one says so" (*Being and Time* 158). Furthermore, upon assuming his guilt, Juan experiences the satisfaction of a duty fulfilled—he considers himself *guilty* for the student riot—and he smiles genuinely at Matilde to express his gratitude and his happiness (Guión 96, 103-5). Guilt is a concern of individu-

als, not a generic abstraction. After the confrontation with the brutal singularity of the *in-itself*—the dead cyclist—Juan can contradict María José: "Yes, the war . . . The war is a very comfortable thing . . . One can blame it for everything . . . for the dead . . . for the ruins" (Guión 58). The third temporal dimension of consciousness, the future, will also change. The future now contains for Juan the call to responsibility and solidarity, which is ultimately "the journey home to myself," as he tells Matilde (Guión 104).

But something else should be said about the existential present of Bardem's characters. Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942):

> Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office of the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. "Begins"—this is important. (12–13)

In *Muerte de un ciclista* there are equivalents of this passage. The day of "why" will arrive in Juan's life, expressed timidly and ironically at first, and then as true rebellion—with irony as he dines with his mother, rebelliously when he announces that he will finally be a hero. Rafa will also live this "why," constantly, but with cynicism. Before the day of "why," there is a mere reiteration of the existential rhythm. The newsreel in the cinema repeats "the same as always" in Juan's words; "always the same faces, the same days. Nothing ever happens," in María José's words; "the same words as always," says the priest in the wedding, according to Miguel, María José's husband. And, in the original script, the party for the Americans is characterized similarly: "There were many familiar faces, all those people that could be seen everywhere, everyday" (Guión 66). One is of course tempted to see in the word "cyclist" a reference to the partially cyclical nature of the movie. Even if there are liberating variations as well, in Bardem's film there are remarkable repetitions of place (Juan dies in the same geographical area where the first cyclist was killed and where he fought in the Spanish Civil War), of physiognomies (Miguel and Juan are strikingly alike in appearance), and of moral challenges (in a sense, the second cyclist breaks the cycle of bad conscience by making the decision to become a witness of the fatal accident).

The monotony of existence, unfolded in a homogenous, rhythmic, and repetitive time, is accompanied by the mode of dependence. This suffocating mode of time finds its cinematic expression in several low- and high-angle shots, which render Juan's servile character all the more pathetic. Juan's servitude should be understood as "the feeling of the

alienation of all of my possibilities" (*Being and Nothingness* 268). The freedom of other individuals, not his own freedom, imposes itself on Juan. His family oppresses: there are subtle, long, low-angle shots when Juan dines with his mother. His social class is based on complicity and personal favors: in another medium, low-angle shot, when Juan watches the NO-DO newsreel in the cinema, he sees images of Jorge, his brother-in-law and protector.[7] Academic life is crushing: in the last shot of the faculty room sequence, a slow high-angle shot buries Juan in a clearly marginal space, as the institution, represented by the imposing furniture, appears to impose itself upon him. The two previous low-angle shots also illustrate another key concept of existentialism: the everyday can always become banal. An affective tonality expresses this existential experience of banality: *ennui* (tedium or boredom). In philosophical terms, boredom is an anesthetic state of being or the expression of an "essential and radical attitude of indifference towards being" (Bobbio 32), epitomized by Camus's Mersault and Caligula. It's the effect of a lack: there is no truly satisfactory meaning from which one can integrate and project all singular experiences toward a unifying purpose. Boredom is neither coincidental nor individual, but rather existential and shared. Thus, it is insufficient to see it only in the sequence where María José complains to her husband of always seeing the same faces, as does Susan Martín-Márquez ("Codes" 511). As Heidegger writes, "Profound boredom, drifting hither and thither in the abysses of existence like a mute fog, draws all things, all men and oneself along with them, together in a queer kind of indifference" ("What is Metaphysics?" 364). It is the absence of attachment toward things and even toward oneself. Boredom is already suggested in the first sequence set in Juan's room, where it is palpable in the extreme close-up of Juan's aimless gaze before the maid calls him for dinner, as well as in his futile attempts to comfort himself, before he himself suggests that even a trip to the country will not relieve the tedium.

A good part of Juan's daily life and that of the people he frequents is characterized by what Blaise Pascal calls "*divertissement*," that is, amusements that serve to divert attention away from one's radical indifference. Instead of thinking about "natural malaise" (*Pensées* 92) produced by awareness of the inexorable passage of time and the fragile nature of the human condition, thought directs itself toward agreeable passions, games, captivating spectacles, or violent and impetuous activities (*Pensées* 92, 94–95). Bardem provides a rather complete repertoire of bourgeois forms of entertainment: weddings, parties, the circus, cinema itself, horse races, art exhibits, and flamenco *tablados*. Juan characterizes María José's life with irony: "Mrs. Castro yawns at the cocktail parties, she gets bored in the canasta tournaments . . . she falls asleep at the black tie concerts" (Guión 58).

In contrast, *Muerte de un ciclista* seems to argue that in blue collar spaces, such as the roadhouse and the tenements, as well as in the university, boredom is absent. Regarding the bourgeoisie, *entertainment* is even another world for *culture*. Rafa incarnates this existential possibility. He is a hero for himself, a hero who triumphs over the tedium of his surroundings with the most refined cynicism as his weapon and cultural scalpel. In fact, before Juan is able to understand the existential crossroads of his own situation, it is the ever-lucid Rafa who diagnoses the mode of existence of an entire social class. But unlike Juan, Rafa does not link his conscience to social ideals.[8] His only means of surviving is the use of a cynicism that is both reflexive and offensive.

> RAFA: In your charity meetings . . . in the parties of landowners and great businesspeople, I—an art critic—represent culture, in capital letters. I eat your caviar, I drink your whiskey . . . I smoke your cigars. In exchange for that, and I think I lose in the deal, I put up with you.
>
> MARÍA JOSÉ: And you get bored.
>
> RAFA: No. I really don't. I entertain myself watching all of you. I see your sins, classify them, file them away and I wait. (Guión 38–39)[9]

Rafa's words refer obliquely to the mode of existence of the individuals that he entertains. They *sin*. According to Bardem's existentialist stance, here *to sin* would mean egoism, that is, the tendency to transform self-love into the determining principle of action without regard for the interests of others—unless those interests foster one's self-love. The social effect of egoism is *conflict*, "war of the consciences" (Theau 92). I would argue, then, that the social world represented in *Muerte de un ciclista* is based on the Sartrean principle of conflict without rest, as exemplified in *Huis clos* (*No Exit*, 1944), or, as Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*: "While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. [. . .] Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (431).

In consonance with Plauto's *lupus est homo homini*, Thomas Hobbes's postulate that every man's power resists and hinders the effects of the power of others (*Leviathan*), and Sartre's social anthropology, where "hell is—other people" (*No Exit* 46), Bardem's film partially pertains to a socially pessimistic tradition of thought—partially, since he leaves room, however, for conversion and desalination. (We should note, however, that

Sartre's diabolical anthropology applies only to the bourgeoisie—not to the working class or university-educated youth).

Examples of conflict as domination abound in *Muerte de un ciclista*: Doña María's rejection of her son's way of life; Rafa's constant attempts to blackmail Juan and María José; Miguel and María José's reciprocal egoism; student opposition to university policies. Still, the flamenco *tablao* sequence may be the paradigmatic instance of the film's driving, oppressive rhythm and conflict—which is itself expressive of the characters' moral tensions (Souef 141)—and for this reason it is also an illustration of Sartre's notion of the other human being as trap and executioner (*No Exit* 8, 30). As critics have pointed out, the film's "hysterical" *montage* (Reisz 32; Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 78) uses "the fast cutting of shots, which are connected by contrast or attraction" (Egido 64), reminding us of Sergei Eisenstein's theory of *montage*.[10] "Montage," writes Eisenstein, is characterized "by collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By conflict" (34). Eisenstein's list of "cinematographic conflicts" (36–37) suggests a vertiginous concentration of them in the *tablao* sequence: Even the first *close-up* of the *cantaores*'s hands collides with the previous shot of a delicate and playful *glissando* of Rafa's hand on a piano keyboard. With audible intensity, the notes of the piano—an instrument of *high culture*—are opposed to the sound of the *palmas*—an instrument of *popular culture* in the *cante jondo*.

"Optical counterpoints" (Eisenstein 37) are used, on the one hand, between rapid shots with a static camera (close-ups of the *cantaores*'s hands, medium shots of faces and guitars, and a very brief full-shot of the *bailaora*), and, on the other hand, the slow panning shot of the spectators, whose focus target is Rafa. In addition, the close-ups of faces paralyzed with hatred and fear collide with the frenetic, cheerful close-ups of feet, legs, clapping hands, and faces of the *cantaores* in "a dramatic exchange of gazes and glances, fast cutting among close-ups that grow successively larger" (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 83). Finally, there is a conflict of tempo between two shots of female bodies, that of the prolonged medium shot of María José, who communicates with Juan by way of a nearly imperceptible facial gesture, and that of a very rapid medium shot of the *bailaora*, lost in frenetic dance.

Catalogue of Gazes and the Limits of the Close-up

In filmmaking, V. I. Pudovkin calls for particular attention to the "expressive plastic material" (26), which I argue is the gaze in *Muerte de un ciclista*—those multiple ways of looking that Bardem articulates with the

close-up. Pudovkin's notion is echoed by Camus, who imagines dramatic art as a convention in which interiority, the "voice of the heart" (*The Myth* 80) should become flesh through the body, gestures, and voice. From this perspective, the cinematic close-up can be considered a means by which the heart becomes flesh. Kinder, who mentions many examples of close-ups (*Blood Cinema* 79, 81), speaks of "the structure of the gaze" in the movie house scene (*Blood Cinema* 78), but I would go so far as to make the structure of the gaze one of the fundamental principles of the entire film.

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (1966) Michel Foucault writes that "no gaze is stable" (5). This instability of the gaze is evident in the first close-up of the two lovers in the first sequence right after the accident. It could even be said that a good part of the plot development consists in the *existential intensification of the gaze*, whose counterpoint is the *quantitative intensification* of the close-up. By the "existential intensification of the gaze," I mean the complexity of nuances in a gaze, registered by Bardem in his script and given form in multiple close-ups. The quantitative intensification of the gaze is easy to describe. Although the medium shot predominates in *Muerte de un ciclista* (there are 228), a great number of them focus attention on the faces of characters, often in anticipation of close-ups (116) and extreme close-ups (35). Leaving aside those that focus on objects or other areas of the body, out of a total of 456 shots, 87 are close-ups and 32 are extreme close-ups of faces. In the last sequence of the film, this technique reaches its climax in the inverted close-up of a wounded or perhaps dead María José, and in the close-ups where we read the fear, indecision, and finally resolution in the face of the second cyclist. Bardem's script gives testimony to the importance of the gaze with the ubiquitous presence of words such as *mirar* (to look), *mirada* (the gaze), *vista* (sight), *vistazo* (glance), and *ojos* (eyes), as well as other, less frequently used verbs, like *ver* (to see), *atisbar* (to peep at) *asomarse* (to look out of), *observar* (to observe), *fijarse* (to stare at) *espiar* (to spy), and *contemplar* (to contemplate, to observe from a distance).

After the accident, Juan and María José live the convulsion of a social world where, in Sartre's words, "the Other *is watching me*" (*Being and Nothingness* 264). The two furtive lovers and now murderers experience the violence of the other through his/her gaze, and in turn they look at others in their attempt to detect what others know about their crimes. In other words, the other's gaze tries to transform a protective opacity into a transparency that enslaves. In others, as in Rafa and Miguel, the gaze assumes the role of the word: one does not inquires with words but rather with glances, stares, the wrinkling of eyes. In this way, the existential intensification is set in motion. Two scenes illustrate

this phenomenon: The first takes place in a classroom at the university. A high-angle long shot from the upper left angle of the room establishes descriptive objectivity but is quickly replaced with several close-ups and extreme close-ups of Juan's face. While reading the newspaper, he discovers that the cyclist is dead and immediately feels that his students—that collective other—penetrate him with a gaze that already knows and judges his deepest secret. With Sartre, Juan surely thinks to himself: "*I am no longer master of the situation*" (*Being and Nothingness* 265). The second sequence takes place at Juan's sister's house. Through a series of rapid cuts, two pairs of gazes enter into a symmetrical conflict: Rafa and Miguel, seated at the piano; María José and Juan, standing nearby. This sequence dramatizes an existentialist principle of the gaze: "Being seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom that is not my freedom" (Bobbio 92). One look from this incisive and nonchalant jester is capable of converting Juan and María José into his prey, although in reality Rafa perhaps knows nothing or very little. What is important is that upon being seen, Juan and María José feel Rafa's gaze as that of a possible executioner.

Following Warnock, we might say that in the two sequences mentioned above the other is not an object of perception but rather the origin of a gaze that modifies and in a certain sense possesses, objectifies. With their gaze, Rafa and Miguel endanger the freedom of two *for-itselfs*, María José and Juan, whose lives are determined by the double secret of their love affair and the murder of the cyclist. "The for-itself when alone," writes Sartre, "transcends the world; it is the nothing by which *there are* things. The Other by rising up confers on the for-itself a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world as a thing among things. This petrifaction in in-itself by Other's look is the profound meaning of the myth of Medusa" (*Being and Nothingness* 430; see Theau 50–51). And with my gaze, I do the same to the other. Two petrifying gazes are locked in combat. Thus, the human world of *being-for-others* is conflict, the struggle of each to become the master among the objectifying, possessive gazes (Warnock 79, 84).

Bardem's close attention to the nuances of the gaze is evident in the script, where adverbs and adjectives ceaselessly deepen the texture of looking. In the director's words, the gaze may be anguished, intolerable, fixed, evasive, endearing, steady, skillful, slippery, distracted, indifferent, inquisitive, silent, a simple glance, or crazed. And the manner of looking can be fleeting, from the corner of the eye, fixedly or very fixedly, with disgust, boringly, coyly, lingeringly, with curiosity, without seeing, deeply, without looking at the other, looking into the depths of the other's eyes, attentively, with or without a definite object, at a succession of objects,

mockingly, over the rim of glasses, carefully, backwards, with shining eyes, upwards, with ferocious hatred, outwards, smiling, downwards, with terrible determination in the eyes, forward, with purity in the eyes, upwards, through the words, without moving and without blinking, without understanding, wordlessly, avidly, with a terrible and desperate hatred, or eyes open wide with shock.

The complexity of the gaze is articulated through three types of shots, each related to the existential status of a character. The extreme close-up is used most frequently for shots of Juan's face, not surprisingly, because the director wants to register in detail the stages of his moral rebellion. For Matilde, Rafa, María José, and Miguel the relatively less invasive close-up is preferred, given that their consciences remain unaltered throughout the film. And Rafa is often filmed with tracking shots (as in the art exhibition, the wedding, and the flamenco party scenes), indicative of his dramatic function—he introduces an undesired, exterior turbulence into the stagnant bourgeois consciences of his milieu. Juan's moral revolution, which is an internal turbulence, is also expressed with a tracking shot in the university stadium scene with Matilde. But while Rafa produces changes in others, Juan changes from within himself.

In spite of the fact that the extreme close-up is never used with María José, one close-up deserves attention. According to Bardem's script, María José crashes her car "against a rocky slope" (Guión 127), but in the final film version her car falls from a bridge—a solution that permits Bardem to be more implacable in his treatment of María José, whose life ends in a violent and inexorable decline captured by the film's only inverted close-up. Indeed, this might seem like a provincially moralistic gesture on Bardem's part; just as Matilde is vindicated, with María José's death so are Juan and the cyclist. "She had her eyes wide open, terribly surprised" (Guión 128) reads Bardem's script remarks for this shot, which Egido interprets as "a treatise on criminal anthropology" (36). Rather than an opportunity "to privilege the star" (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 74), the inverted close-up is the cinematrographic instrument of a moral thesis: adultery and murder, and more generally, egoism, are punished by destiny—not by the family, nor society, nor the state.

Also, Bardem opposes close-ups of the egoistic María José, Miguel, and Rafa to optimistic and communitarian long shots protagonized by students (the classroom and university quad scenes), by workers (the tenement and blue-collar neighborhood scenes), and by the second cyclist, all of whom incarnate values of human solidarity denied by the bourgeoisie. For human collectives different from the Spanish bourgeoisie in power, these long shots can be considered optimistic, since the students' request before the university president is accepted; most of the people at the

tenement scenes, mainly kids, run and laugh happily; and the second cyclist rides toward a house light for help after witnessing María José's crash—a gesture of solidarity that generates "our sympathetic identification" (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 86).

Sartre writes: "What I know is the body of another, and the essential facts which I know concerning my own body come from the way in which others see it" (*Being and Nothingness* 218). Sartre's existential doctrine on the body and the use of the close-up in *Muerte de un ciclista* allow us to define a gaze that becomes penetrating, persistent, insatiably inquisitive. Indeed, this becomes necessary, given that the gaze—not words—is the essential manner of accessing the other, knowing the other, escaping the individualistic frontiers of solipsistic immanence. However, in Sartre the phenomenology of the gaze is an opportunity to build his anthropology of conflict, which is transcendent but still human. For this infernal anthropology, binding social ties are those of war and survival: others want to destroy my freedom by making me a thing (Medusa's gaze) and at the same time I know myself through others. Despite its infernal nature, in Sartre's *No Exit* and *Being and Nothingness* this anthropology is unavoidable and effectively at work.

Through his use of the close-up, Bardem reveals that this kind of anthropology is indeed an important aspect of social life. However, for him it is socially insufficient, even avoidable. According to what could be called Bardem's "cinematic doctrine" of the gaze, his use of close-ups and extreme close-ups seems to argue that authentic human bonds are possible through social commitments. The close-up and the extreme close-up are shots of psychological individualism bound to annihilation—Juan, by the hand of his own social class; María José, by destiny or by her egotism pushed to the limits. But rebellion, for Camus, is a decision of going beyond *in* and *with* other fellow humans. Human solidarity is the place from which *a personal act* takes off (Remarque 11)—and these are precisely the two poles of the social utopia to which Bardem gives visual form. It is by way of the long shot combined with the close-up that he expresses the values of a future social utopia, most poignantly expressed in the scenes in which Matilde, rebelling against university decisions, is supported by her fellow students, and in the final sequence where the second cyclist overcomes his own egoism to look for help in a distant lighted house. One must conclude that *Muerte de un ciclista* is not simply the psychological exploration and criticism of individuals in close-up; it also proposes an imminently social morality through a combination of long shots (indicating communitarian solidarity) and close-ups (glimpsing acts of personal decision).

Notes

My heartfelt thanks to my friend and colleague Thomas C. Platt for the English translation of this piece, written originally in Spanish. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are his.

1. In this piece, by "work" I refer only to *Muerte de un ciclista* and its original script.

2. Cerón Gómez follows Egido closely, situating Bardem's film in the Spanish historical context as the first to offer a "perspective different from that of the winners" (121), as he insists in the film's eminently political character (122).

3. I owe this idea to David Grossvogel (personal interview).

4. At least in Camus, it still makes sense to speak of sin, as long as it is understood as "sin without God" (*The Myth* 40).

5. Death only reveals to Mersault the absurdity of *existence in general.* Thus, his understanding remains theoretical. In contrast, death reveals to Juan the absurdity of *his own existence*, providing him with the opportunity to root his personal decisions in social commitments. In this way, Juan's understanding is both theoretical and practical.

6. According to Miguel, egoism, as a principle of behavior, is the motor of María José's actions. Fear, as well, will be. Matilde will say that the academic injustice that she suffers is caused by Juan's egoism. Rafa will broaden the idea of egoism to characterize the entire social class that he criticizes and entertains.

7. According to Joan Ramon Resina, "the NO-DO was the Francoist version of the German *Wochenrundschau.* It was a newsreel with a political, triumphant tone, that is, propaganda for the regime, projected obligatorily in all of the cinemas in Spain, before the feature film." I think that that is what Juan is watching, so in this manner the complicity of Juan's family with the regime is accentuated. Appearing in the NO-DO is proof of the family's integration in the upper echelons of the regime ("Re: NO-DO").

8. In Camus' existentialism, the term conscience no longer has Christian echoes. In Bardem's film and script, it still does (see Guión 93, 117).

9. Does Bardem not do the same in his film and in his script?

10. Following Eisenstein's *montage* theories, one can establish connections between thematic material and cinematographic techniques. By the mid-fifties, Bardem was familiar with the works of Soviet theorists like Eisenstein and Pudovkin (see Egido 59, 129, 131), and, more specifically, we know that Bardem read Pudovkin's *Film Technique* in an English translation (Egido 6).

3

Viridiana Coca-Cola

(Luis Buñuel, 1961)

Tom Conley

Film theory and analysis of the last decades have witnessed a shift from psychoanalytical to spatial modes of inquiry. Issues concerning space have overcome those given to the science of the self. Psychoanalytical readings have been vertical in orientation, in search of deeply rooted structures that inform the contradictions and paradoxes at the basis of life. According to this tradition of inquiry, films elucidate the forces that motivate the dilemmas and tribulations of subjectivity, what analysts call the "difficulty of being." In some measure the good films we choose to study compel because they tell us that the stories of our own lives are grist for screenplays of bad movies. Through psychoanalytical readings of cinema, a process of dialogue, imitation, and renewed perception is possible. Yet wherever psychoanalytical study of cinema is at stake there come forward myriad issues that project mental and psychic space onto that of geography.

If access to subjectivity is a basic human drive, the subject or individual person cannot acquire agency without having a sense of location obtained by displacement. How and where the subject finds itself in the world and in what ways its itineraries are drawn become vital questions in both the clinical realm and in cinema. In the latter, geography becomes delightfully complicated because the topographies of cinema commingle with those of the viewer occupying a given mental and physical space. Where does a spectator engage a strong psychic relation with a film? In

Fig. 3. Coca-Cola and the Civil Guard. Courtesy of Criterion Collection DVD.

what time and space, and in respect to what genres or traditions? And, too, with the aid of what archives? If he or she claims to make sense of the relation of a personal geography through a grasp of film history, how can it be directed across at once spatial, temporal, national and linguistic barriers?

In partial response it can be said that for the spectator mental and physical spaces are rife with history. What the director and film artist do to exploit the milieus in which their film takes place cannot be extricated from what it represents. A film forever constructs a past time and space that is a product of the present that it cannot specify, or else, paradoxically, the past time in a film is felt to be present only when it seems at once remote and recent.[1] The more remote the past, the more it appears to be inextricably bound with its more recent counterpart. As a result, various times and spaces—those of the making, of the representation, and of the viewing of a film—cohabit with each other. Such layering requires what Gilles Deleuze calls "stratigraphic" readings of the image that apply to the complex time and space of cinema. This approach tends to take up film as if it were a psychogeography.[2]

In this piece I would like to look at Buñuel's cinema from such an angle, not in order either to validate or impugn Deleuze's work on the director but, rather, to use his concept of the "drive-image" as a point of

departure for a close reading of several liminal sequences of *Viridiana* (1961). In reviewing Buñuel's scandalous films of times past—scandalous because they cross or transgress mental, social, and physical barriers for which they are a diagnostic and an interpretation—we sometimes wonder if we have seen the features so often that what we imagine to have been their original impact has worn away, eroded, been forgotten, or had never been there in the first place. We wonder, too, if the extraordinary psychoanalytic dimensions for which they are known—their emphasis on castration, fetishism, narcissism, hysteria, obsessional neurosis—are less convincing today than they had been when, long ago it seems, Freud and Lacan had held sway in film studies. Over the passage of time it may be that the spatial dynamics of Buñuel's cinema may have gained force where the psychoanalytical or religious material has lost some of its luster. It suffices to recall how current and forceful are the originary spaces of Paris and Las Hurdes in *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1929) and *Tierra sin pan* (*Land without Bread*, 1932), or the slums of Mexico City in *Los olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*, 1950) and *El bruto* (*The Brute*, 1952) may be close to the dystopic paradise at once of *Las aventuras de Robinson Crusoe* (*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1952), or the stagnant quarters of both *El ángel exterminador* (*The Exterminating Angel*, 1962) and *Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, 1972). These images remain while the psychodynamics seem to be narrative machines that drive the spectator through the spaces they portray.

In this regard no film seems so rich and problematic as *Viridiana*. The history of its composition is part of its geography insofar as Generalissimo Franco welcomed the estranged director to return to his native soil and gave him carte blanche to do anything he wished. That Buñuel chose to shoot a virulently anti-Catholic film and that it was no sooner banished from Spain than celebrated in Cannes and the rest of the world are part of its legacy. But, more tellingly, the complex spaces it articulates within its form seem to confirm what Deleuze calls an originary world. Yet the milieu of *Viridiana* seems anchored in a time that appears too circumstantial and too contingent to fit the category. It might therefore be worth considering the originary world through the lens of Deleuze's appreciation before taking up the divisions defining the "bipolar" aspect of the feature that has on one side the story of the meeting of Viridiana (Silvia Pinal) with Don Jaime (Fernando Rey) and his suicide and, on the other, the fortunes of the inheritors and inheritance of the *hidalgo*'s estate. It will be seen that at the cusp of the two parts a short sequence bears telling effect on the spatial tension of the film and even projects it onto the horizons both of its time and of ours.

The Drive-Image and the Originary World

In a decisive chapter of *L'image-mouvement*, taking up the background of contemporary expression in the medium, Deleuze coins the concept of the "drive-image" or *image-pulsion* to show how movement and action, the very essence of cinema at its origins and two of its defining elements throughout its development in the first half of the twentieth century, begin to vacillate. The drive-image calls into question our affective relations with the image, those emotive moments which we assume D. W. Griffith had inaugurated with his close-ups of hands that anxiously clasp and rub themselves in the last and crowning story of *Intolerance*. Action and movement are attenuated when the close-up delivers sentiment and sensation to the point that it seems to be a sign of truth and psychological verisimilitude. The drive-image is somewhere between the "realism" of action and the "idealism" of affection. Affection (what belongs to the emotive and psychological dimensions of the medium) and action (the crux of Aristotelian poetics that eschew psychology) are studied in a distinctly *geographical* sense. Affective images are found in *lieux quelconques* or "any-places-whatsoever," and they are charged with emotion while action is given to "determinate milieus" and "behaviors" appropriate to them (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement* 173).

Between the one and the other is delineated a cinema that takes place in the *originary worlds* of its own creation. Neither action nor affection is capable of representing this world; nor can either convey its feeling to the spectator. The drive-image becomes the site of an originary milieu that can only be described in terms of space and place:

> Let there be a house, a country, a region: these are real—geographic or social—milieus of actualization. It would be said that in part or in whole they have inner connections with an originary world. The originary world can be marked by the artificiality of a decor (the principality of an operetta, a forest, or a swamp in a studio) as much as by a preserved zone (a real desert, a virgin forest). It can be recognized by its amorphous [*informe*] character : it is a pure background or rather a depthlessness fashioned from nonformed materials, it is sketchy or piecemeal, cut and rented by nonformal functions, acts, or energetic dynamisms that do not refer to objects as such. Characters are like animals; the man of the drawing room is a bird of prey; the lover is a goat; the poor man a hyena. Not that they have their own form or behavior: but their actions are prior to any distinction between man and animal. They are human beasts. (*Cinéma 1* 174)

The allusion to Zola and to Renoir (to *La bête humaine* as both novel and film) is clear, and so also a nod to the art of naturalism current at the beginning of cinema. But as the elucidation continues, Buñuel becomes increasingly a creator par excellence of originary worlds and of the topographies within them. An originary world is never mythic or allegorical in a psychoanalytical sense because it is anchored in the "historical and geographical milieu that serves as its medium," and it "exists and operates only at the basis of a real milieu, and is valorized only by its immanence in this milieu whose violence and cruelty it reveals" (*Cinéma 1* 175). In this light Buñuel is shown to be one of Nietzsche's "doctors of civilization" who diagnose its illnesses. For the director the originary world carries the bonus of being a site for caustic reflection that goes well beyond the time and space in which it is placed. And yet, at the same time, it is located both in history and geography.

In his films, second, inherited geography is dashed to pieces. A part of a body or a detail, often located in a close-up, turns the close-up itself into a fetish or a partial object, into a state of being far from that of the condition of emotion in which we might believe it exists. As it goes with surreal practices, the place in which the object is seen is quickly estranged in order to invite consideration of the ways it disrupts its seemingly natural milieu. The object figures in a cinematic drive that rips asunder the entities to which it is attached. It is an object of prey for the human beasts among those cineastes who *exhaust* the milieus that constitute an originary world. The milieus are populated with people rich and poor and with masters and their servants. Buñuel is revolutionary, more "terrifying" and "insidious" than most directors, because those who inhabit the lower depths exhaust the world of the rich, especially in the world of the "beggars and the servant of *Viridiana*. Whether among the rich or the poor, the drives [*pulsions*] share the same goal and the same destiny: to pulverize, to tear to pieces, to accumulate waste, to amass huge piles of filth, and to bring everything together in a single and sole death-drive" (182). Masters and slaves alike participate in the same labor of degradation, and as a result the "rich, beautiful, and virtuous Viridiana evolves only through the consciousness she acquires of her uselessness and her parasitism that inhere in the drive for Goodness. Everywhere the same drive of parasitism" (182).

In sum, the primal world imposes a degradation, an entropy, or eternal return upon the creatures who are its inhabitants. For Buñuel a "good" repetition in the eternal return results when, in both mental and geographical ways, it is not recidivist, lapsing into further degradation, but "seems to abolish limits and to open them onto the world at large" (185). Thus it could be inferred that at the end of *Viridiana*, when the

trio of Jorge, the heroine, and Ramona (Margarita Lozano) sits down to play cards, the dreams of good work and Christian charity and its specious values are done and gone, and so too are those of social progress with which Jorge would have capitalism and democracy thrive on his dead uncle's domain. The game of cards becomes a power of repetition that stops only when the camera pulls backward and isolates the players in the depth of field, in the closed space of the *hacienda* that the beggars have recently trashed and the character of the heroine whom they have sullied.

Split Spaces and Scenes of Writing

Geography in *Viridiana*, however, has a special relation with the originary world, with the exhaustion or destruction of an inherited space, and with the principle of return and repetition. The divided quality of its narrative cuts a line between the mental and physical spaces embodied by Viridiana and Jorge. The narrative has much to do with a polar psychogeography. On one level Viridiana is first portrayed prior to the moment she will take her vows and live the rest of her days in a convent. The niece of an aging Iberian noble, Don Jaime, who lives introspectively on his unkempt hacienda in rural Spain, she is compelled to visit him after she learns he has anonymously paid for her education. Don Jaime discovers her uncanny resemblance to his wife, who died twenty years earlier. Having been madly in love with his wife, he convinces Viridiana to stay with him for several days. With the help of his maid, Ramona, he has Viridiana wear his wife's nuptial finery before he drugs her. Like an exquisite corpse, Viridiana lies prostrate and prey to her uncle's lust. He checks himself, but later confesses his desires and ultimate restraint. Upon the heroine's departure he conceives a plan (we learn after the fact) to hang himself and have Viridiana and his natural son inherit his estate.

The news of the suicide prompts Viridiana to return to the farm. At that point the film enters into another space within the one that had been shown in the first part. Jorge, Don Jaime's son, returns to the farm with Lucía (Victoria Zinny), a woman with whom he shares his life. Viridiana expiates her feeling of guilt by bringing a band of beggars to the property while Jorge seeks to modernize the land, and, as it were, bring the estate up to the speed of modern times. The two inheritors of the farm coexist and go about their duties in the outdoor areas of the hacienda. Lucía, Jorge's friend, becomes jealous of Viridiana and abruptly leaves the scene. When Jorge and Viridiana go to town together on matters of business, the beggars invade the house, where they plan a feast

that soon turns into an orgy. When the couple returns, the beggars exit, except for two stragglers who tackle Viridiana and begin to violate her in front of Jorge. Jorge begs one of them to kill the other in exchange for money, which the wretch does, thus saving Viridiana from the fate she almost suffered as the victim of Don Jaime's fantasies. The film ends when Viridiana, unable to devote herself to sacrifice, joins Jorge and Ramona at a table where they play cards.

The film appears to draw much of its force along the edge of the line demarcating the one story and its economy from the other. The first is familiar and given to Don Jaime's perversion in view of the ravishing Viridiana's attempts to consolidate herself in the utopian closure of a convent. The second is social and societal when it brings onto the scene the natural son and his companion, the pack of beggars, and the workers hired to renovate the grounds of the villa. The primal geography of each part is accentuated by a marked contrast of spatial texture. In the first the meeting of Don Jaime and Viridiana, which takes place on the grounds of the farm, quickly gives way to an inner, cloistered, dark and even stagnant interior of the farmhouse. The second begins outdoors, in the wooded areas of the domain that had been glimpsed at the beginning, and ends indoors, in the kitchen and dining hall, in which the orgy and rape are pictured and staged through a series of *tableaux vivants* taken from Leonardo, Millet (via Dalí), and Goya. The first narrative begins on the outside as a threshold to an overbearingly closeted atmosphere of Don Jaime's retreat while the second accumulates images and accelerated montage of both unproductive and productive labors on the grounds and along the road leading to the farm before the beggars' bedlam, inside, gives way to the new regime of what seems, in the final shot, to be, after all the ruckus, a *ménage à trois*.

The sequence on which the two panels of the film are hinged takes place in a public space unlike anything witnessed in either of the two halves.[3] Its force accrues by virtue of the last shots of the final sequence of the first panel. Don Jaime has just confronted his own frustration in having botched the rape of Viridiana in all of her sleeping beauty and failed in his proposal (which, because he is speechless, Ramona takes the initiative to utter for him), to have the blonde beauty marry him. Viridiana departs. He has just returned (in the middle of sequence 10) from a window from which he has seen (in a pan shot taken outdoors) his niece leave in a horse-drawn carriage that little Rita follows in the same way that dogs, seen later in the film (in sequence 18), follow the buggies to which they are tethered.

The shots depicting Viridiana's departure are split. One is taken from the outdoors or through a window to pan left in following the movement

of the carriage, while the other is taken from the inside of a window to indicate Jaime's point of view that might have been that of the former shot. But Jaime's take on the departure clearly cannot be solely what he has seen because the mullions of the window before his eyes are not visible in the preceding shot. Like the camera, his imagination seems to be witnessing the departure.[4] He stares at the carriage that moves along a path defined by the bare branches of a row of trees. A tracking pan moves to the right, from the inside, beginning at the window where he goes from a medium close-up in three-quarter angle into close-up and in profile just before he walks to a desk. A column in close-up and in soft focus occludes the movement and even appears to move by when the camera pans left to display Jaime, absorbed in what seems to be strategic contemplation (he rubs his hands together), moving a record from the writing surface onto a shelf above which stands a heavy candelabrum. The column that has just disappeared from the foreground makes clear the presence of two others in the background that seem to form an inner portico. In medium close-up, now seen when the camera dollies in, Don Jaime sits in front of a pair of carved wooden doors through which he has frequently passed and through whose keyhole Ramona had spied upon Viridiana when she undressed after her arrival at the farm. He lifts a panel to obtain a sheet of paper (the gesture resembles his lifting of the veils from Viridiana's supine body in the previous sequence) before the film cuts to a close-up of the blank sheet: his hands twist the cap of the fountain pen and remove it from its cylinder before they place the latter on the white area of the paper. The camera pans up, following Don Jaime's right hand, which strokes his beard as he smiles in joyous contemplation of what, it seems, he will be writing. Despondency of the previous sequence gives way to agency, which might be taken to be part of an originary "scene of writing." The camera closes in to show him in a pose resembling a meditative portrait just as he prepares to put the pen to paper. He chuckles.

The traditional close-up that would record his pain turns into something that cannot be named but that stages an impulse to write. The shot brings forward at least two scenes on which Jaime casts his eyes. One is upon the outdoors in the panoramic of the moving carriage. In a quick panoramic, Rita (Teresa Rabal), a voyeur in the previous sequence whom Jaime had seen from the window skipping rope with Viridiana, runs after the accelerating vehicle as if to bring attention to the landscape around the farmhouse. The other is that of the space on which Jaime will write. He casts his eyes on the sheet of paper that had just been covered by the grooved record (a standard clay disc that turns on a spring-driven Victrola at 78 rpm) at rest on the top of its container. Jaime quickly displaces the

record in order to touch and feel the paraphernalia on the desk, perhaps as he had fondled Viridiana in the previous sequence. We discover that he is seeing, hearing, and soon writing as might a director staging the very sequence as it might appear in the film. The narrative is doubled by the *ciné-écriture* that collapses the inner and outer space into one of entirely cinematic texture. It is also matched by a force of gravity that pulls the spectator into the scene such that he or she (or we) is looking at the scene with the same fetishistic intensity as Jaime viewed the carriage through the window or, for that matter, as Rita watched Jaime's act of perversion from the tree by the window of the room in which he placed Viridiana's inert body. And our memory of Rita's discovery of voyeuristic pleasure is doubled, too, by our own when we glimpse her underwear exposed from behind as she raises her buttocks when lurching forward to see what Don Jaime is beholding.[5]

Viridiana Coca-Cola

The film cuts directly to a medium close-up of Viridiana, her head draped by a black shawl. A new sequence (the eleventh) has begun. The heroine stands in profile under an arcade that stretches along the side of a square in a rural pueblo. Also in a contemplative pose—not dissimilar to Don Jaime's of a moment ago—she stands between two wooden struts that might be likened to the trunks of as many trees. At this point Jaime's scene of writing, if Pasolini's concept of "free indirect subjectivity" holds true, could be understood to project this very image of Viridiana. In a narrative mode the change of shot and of decor would imply that one sequence and its space give way to another. Yet the straight cut—neither a fade nor a dissolve is employed to mark a crucial transition from one area of the film to another—suggests that no change in place or time has taken place. The Viridiana whom we see under the arcade would be the captive to the very "scene of writing" in which Jaime imagines her.

The crucial confusion is quickly dispelled (or remapped) as soon as the shot becomes a sequence in its own right: as Viridiana arches her head downward, a wisp of smoke unfurls from a space behind her neck. She moves forward, to the left, in harmony with the ringing of the bells of a church (*off*). Behind her, in the deep middle ground and in a frame formed by the two columns, emerge two men who smoke and speak together without noticing her presence.[6] The inner space of the public square is shown when she crouches, gets back up again, and begins to ambulate toward a site signaled by the sound of tires rolling on hard dirt. She sees something to the left (out of frame) as the camera

tracks backward to keep her at a medium distance from the lens. The two men seem choreographed to follow her from behind at a distance of several meters. A dog in the background follows an identical trajectory before it runs left and out of the frame that registers a horse-drawn carriage, perhaps that which delivered Viridiana from the hacienda to the public place. Of a kind known prior to the age of the automobile, it marks a strong contrast to the front of the bus that will soon enter into the frame.

The camera passes by three wooden columns in such a way that the space between each of them resembles the content of as many photograms in a strip of film. Viridiana continues and walks through a trio of men—a soldier, a driver, a bystander—who stand in front of the hood of a vehicle aimed to the right. The track continues until she reaches the side door that opens and out of which three passengers disembark. All seem to be embodiments of Spain of time immemorial. The last man to descend, clasping a cigarette between his lips, wears a beret and carries a bag of belongings under one arm. Her eyes cast downward, Viridiana turns toward the camera with her valise in hand. She advances while the three men the camera has just registered climb aboard after handing their tickets to the driver.

An everyday occurrence in a quotidian space: when she turns away to let others embark in front of her the heroine appears selflessly charitable or else, too, so immersed in perplexing confusion that she is unaware of the milieu. On the walkway she stands over the men in profile, as if lost in contemplation, before the driver extends his hand to invite her to give him her ticket and, in an instant of gracious but mechanical generosity, he takes care of her valise.[7] The shot, of a duration of forty-six seconds, is a dynamic *plan-séquence* quite unlike any other in the film. It records the ambient world in which anonymous people bear the burden of living. It is a highly cinematic world in which the people are caught in the "frame" or *cadre* of a milieu set in strong contrast to the "originary" site of Don Jaime's farm. It presents blonde Viridiana, the woman of an extraordinary mix of Spanish, French, and American beauty (she whispers limpid Castillian but could be the model for Catherine Deneuve and a reincarnation of Marilyn Monroe) in a setting that could be anywhere in rural Iberia.

Viridiana's unlikely presence in this space becomes especially incongruous when the following shot reveals the origin of the previous take. The camera, now placed on the ground of the square, is aimed at the walkway under the roof of the wooden arcade on which Viridiana had moved in the direction of the bus. As in the previous shot, the same roughly hewn columns supporting cushion-capitals mark both the local

and the cinematic character of the area. Two members of the *Guardia Civil* flanking two civic officials—one, wearing an overcoat, who walks ahead and the other who struts behind—advance and pass by a dog that browses by their feet. Two boys in shorts are seated by one of the columns where they are engrossed in reading comic books in a way that matches the unassuming attitude of the two men in the background of the previous shot. We hear the cries of children playing and the bus gurgling at idling speed.

The shot begins a slow pan that seems to accelerate as the four men approach their goal. The civic official moves ahead and out of frame to the right while the others are seen in profile, in the very midpoint of the pan, walking by a sign displaying a large "Pepsi-Cola" bottle cap on the wall advertising what might, inside and behind the barrier, be a Spanish café. The pan continues, the men accelerate their steps, and by them there passes another sign advertising "Coca-Cola" as the camera continues by three more columns and several window openings and doorways behind the arcade. The signs are all situated at the eye line of the public officials. The camera stops its lateral movement when a second "Cola-Cola" sign is set directly in view between the civil guard to the left and the official (wearing a beret) to the right. He turns to greet Viridiana, who enters the frame. The camera dollies in to catch the couple in medium close-up as it holds the billboard with its characteristic script ("beba Coca-Cola") in three-quarter angle in the background. Two women pass by, baskets in their arms, who seem to be attending to daily chores. The sign remains in view behind the second member of the civil guard, who stands above and behind the official who greets Viridiana. He shakes her hand before informing her that she cannot leave—implied is that she cannot exit any space whatsoever in the film—before she moves left and into the company of the men. All in all, in its career the shot lasts twenty-seven seconds before the film cuts directly to a panoramic of an American sedan of 1940s vintage (a black Dodge? a traditional Checker Cab?) rolling across the outer space of Jaime's hacienda from the viewpoint, as the camera makes clear, of Rita and Ramona, who stand under the tree. It is the very site where, as the shot progressively reveals, the group, exiting from the vehicle that has come to an abrupt halt, walks toward the camera and directs their eyes at what the lens has not yet shown. At this point the film seems to avow that, like Viridiana herself, it cannot exit from the space it has created either.

The two shots mark a line of divide between the first and second halves of the film. The three billboards are the only signs of a world *off* and far from the ambiance of the convent or the hacienda. They are on location, in a real time and a local space, and they are profilmic, but

replete with reference to everyday life in postwar Spain. They have such realistic effect that the drone of the passenger bus, a would-be metaphor for the machinery of the film, suggests the presence of a motor of history or a mechanism of destiny. The sound of children at play and the sight of two dogs, snatches of local color in a painting of rural life, imply much about an immemorial or even protracted *Spanish* time of being. Yet the "Pepsi-Cola" and "Coca-Cola" signs indicate that we are at a moment when the commodification of Europe is taking place, with capital enterprise led under the Marshall Plan. Yet, where the sight of the billboards at the eye line of the *Guardia Civil* would bear critical force in a critique of the repressive apparatus, the camera focuses on gentility and care in the way a public official handles the traumatic effects of a horrible turn of events.

Without noting the effect of the three signs, Francisco Aranda cites the two shots of this sequence to emphasize how much the director's view "is the observation of an anthropologist rather than an aesthete" (*Luis Buñuel* 194). Recalling the day of the shooting, Aranda notes how the locals compared the economy of cinematic means at Buñuel's disposal to the extravagance they had witnessed in the recent shooting in the same vicinity of Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings*. The apparent simplicity of the first shot, states Aranda, betrays perfectly the sorrow of departure and, on the part of Viridiana, a "fragility and defencelessness." Buñuel had cut the shot in order not to include her utterance in which she asks the driver how much her ticket will cost. Instead of holding to the continuity of the narrative, Buñuel abbreviated the take at the point she reaches the bus and finds herself amid passengers exiting and entering the vehicle.

Aranda's parable betrays an economy of economy. He praises Buñuel for truncating the shot that would have been diegetically spendthrift and too obviously redundant when the heroine inquires about the cost of her trip. But Buñuel cuts costs further by sparing several extra meters of film stock. The biographer adds that in the first take the camera is placed "within the portico, so that we see the protagonist approaching us [and] going out into the square to the open air." In its movement and in the penumbra of the dark setting the shot would seem to express the heroine's anxiety at her departure. In the second shot the camera, placed in the full light of the public square, records the police who enter "from the shadowy interior" (198) by the columns that had been in Viridiana's background. The first shot in *contrejour* is complemented by the second in its bright foreground and dark background. Aranda calls the representation of the *Guardia* in their cloaks and tricornes "a very Spanish image" in the style of García Lorca, but also an Eisensteinian one as well since

opposition and contrast are underscored by a simple change of position of the camera that obtains antithetical effects of luminosity.

Arcades and Trees

The efficiency ascribed to Buñuel's camerawork does not account for this other aspect of the economy that brings forward issues of originarity, recent history, and the globalization of cinema. The space common to the primal world just witnessed in the first part of the film and the presence of commodification and consumerism in the emblems of Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola in rural Spain are reflective of cinema per se. Indirect reference is possibly made to Luis García Berlanga's cinematic satire in *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* (1952), but in a broad sense the billboards refer to a space that is far more driven by global economy than anything seen up to this point. The arcade or portico belongs to a cinematic design that recurs as often as the more common fetish-objects that would comprise Buñuel's signature, especially the close-ups of feet or Rita's jumprope. The architecture bears resemblance not only to a strip of film but also to myriad forms that, as of the title-credits, shape the greater landscape of the film.

The credit-sequence begins with a static image of a cloister. In three-quarter view three octagonal columns on high plinths support as many cushion-capitals below a fairly flat roof. They are bathed in bright light and are set against the darker shadows of the space behind them. The singing of Händel's inspirational Hallelujah Chorus on the soundtrack enhances the fixity. The crescendo invites the eye to ascend upward and perceive a faint trace of sky at the upper reach of the frame, yet the tiny piece of heaven seems distant and inaccessible in view of the stasis of the image and the movement of the credit-lines that emerge and disappear in a protracted series of dissolves. A remarkable opposition is obtained where Händel's chorus, which emanates from neither an ostensive nor a designated place in the image, is complemented by one of the final credits at the foot of the image, " 'Shimmy Doll' used by permission of the author of Gil Snapper," a piece of rock'n roll that, in direct opposition to the title-sequence, accompanies the final shot of the film in sequence 28.

The horizontal line of the credits in white script, perpendicular to the three columns, suggests the presence of a gridding or a mapping of things real within the space of the shot. Lasting more than seventy-seven seconds and by all accounts the longest of the film, the title-credits blend

into the first shot of the initial sequence. A peeling of bells that follows the end of the Hallelujah Chorus fills the space, shown after a straight cut of a convent courtyard. The shot begins in the arcade from an angle identical to that which portrays Viridiana in the public square en route to the bus. In the first shot nine bays recede to the right along the side of a courtyard bathed in light and, in the bright background, in full view is the three-level elevation of an adjacent wing of the cloister. A double file of children march into the space from left to right, in medium depth, their passage prompting the camera to pan left as if it were directing Viridiana's movement in the same direction. In soft focus and almost in a blur a mother superior and a priest hurry across the area by the arcade while the children, seen through the openings between the columns, continue to march into the courtyard. The camera continues its pan before stopping and aiming its lens along the line of the receding columns on the opposite side, indicating that the pier stands at one of the four corners of the arcade. The first shot pans across a medium close-up of the same columns. The mother superior, dressed in black vestments, is now close to the camera. She calls for Viridiana, who comes forward to learn from her voice (*off*) that her uncle will not be attending the ceremonial vows. The shot tracks backward under the arcade as it follows the two nuns, who exchange words. The mother superior advises Viridiana to leave the convent in order to meet the man who has secretly paid for her education. It is crucial that the shot comes to a stop when Viridiana contemplates departure. The camera is arrested at the point where she is about to consign herself to the convent.

The three shots (that include the credits) establish a milieu striated by columns. The sequence registers the moment in which a significant exit is anticipated. The ecclesial space of the beginning of the film is quickly shown having as its counterpart the secular area of the pueblo in the sequence recording Viridiana's departure and return to Don Jaime's estate. A straight cut is made to a medium close-up of (Rita's) two feet skipping rope, by which is cast the shadow of an elongated trunk of a tree. The dark swath resembles the shadow that in the former shot would have been cast by the stone column at the corner of the cloister. The camera pans upward to catch Don Jaime walking toward his farm and chapel in the distance by a clump of trees that further complements the enclosing patterns of columns and piers just seen.[8]

The meeting of the niece and her uncle (in sequence 2) underscores the same presence of vertical columns. Viridiana descends from a horse-drawn buggy. She turns to pick up her valise, which with a silent gesture the driver insists he will handle for her. She walks left, in front of the stiff whip that the driver has just put in its cylindrical holder. Viridiana takes quick note of Rita, who runs into the frame and meets

Ramona. In a two-shot they stare at each other across a vertical swath of two trees that divide the frame into two halves before, voice-off, the soft exclamation, "¡Viridiana!" (uttered by Don Jaime) interpellates and compels the camera to track right. It goes by the carriage and along another row of trees in the background. Viridiana whispers, as if speaking both to Ramona and to the camera operator, "con su permiso," and walks forward. The frame finally arrests its movement when it holds, in a similar two-shot in the same *plan-séquence*, on Viridiana and Don Jaime facing each other. Each on either side of the frame, they are poised, except now Viridiana is on the left and her interlocutor stands to the right. In the deceptively innocuous exchange of signs of welcome and greeting, just after the wagon has come into view, Jaime asks if Viridiana's bus was late. The mention of the public transport appears to refer to the departure in the eleventh sequence.

Two economies are made manifest in the space that Viridiana, looking about, calls beautiful ("es muy bonito el sitio") and that Jaime, in measured response, says is as peaceful as the convent. One bears on a tradition of internment and the closed circulation of its libidinal energies, and the other on the remote potential of change of the kind that, in his work on the drive-image, Deleuze has noted in scenarios of open-ended repetition. In the latter area the commodification and modernization of the estate (and, it is inferred, the Spanish nation) would be the inevitable outcome. The shot dissolves to an abstract ground on which the feet of the couple shuffle forward. The camera tracks with them, stops to catch Jaime's shoes pushing the dusty soil, and then pans up to a medium close-up of the couple in front of thick foliage. Viridiana graciously thanks her uncle for taking care of her needs (while a cow belches an unceremonious moo, *off*, somewhere in the background). The camera that seems at once patient and restless pans left to follow the niece and her uncle against the vegetation and sky. Viridiana notes that the fields are unkempt. The remark prompts Jaime to affirm that he rarely goes outside of the house. The pan and track continue along a road aligned with trees. The film cuts to Rita, the maid's "wild" daughter, in the bushes, who adds—after spying on the scene—that Jaime forces her to jump rope whenever he egresses from his home. The trees tend to striate the outdoor space of the film in the same way that the columns and arcades cut frames in the spaces made clear with the title and front-credits.

Cloisters and Conclusions

At the beginning, the columns and trees indicate that a cloistered space is found both in the convent and on the grounds of Jaime's hacienda. Its

nature becomes critically perplexing in the arcade of the public square, the only area of the film where inscriptions are seen that refer to the contemporary world at large. The "Coca-Cola" signs refer to what seems to be a world *off*, that of Spain of 1961, that is nonetheless held within an originary frame. Yet, like the end of the feature, the signs are degraded indications of openings that *might* promise an advent of change or an incursion of historical time. The signs belong, too, to a network that includes the electric turntable playing the refrains of "Shimmy Doll" in the place of the Händel heard both in the credit-sequence and during the beggars' orgy. Would the signs and the song be repetitions bearing a sign of *egression* where perversion and *regression* had reigned? An answer to the question is suggested by the receding movement of the shot that leaves the trio of Jorge, Ramona, and Viridiana behind a threshold and in a closeted space that becomes a vanishing point. The refrain of the song ("shake, shake, shake") marks a *ritournelle* and repetition while the shot itself retracts along a linear path.

The final tableau might thus anticipate, as had two shots recording Viridiana's aborted departure from Jaime's world, the advent of a regime of new and other products of North American facture. If Coca-Cola is one of them, the three signs in the pueblo cannot fail to anticipate, too, a political mentality that at the end of the 1960s Jean-Luc Godard felt was nourished by "Marx and Coca-Cola." In her strange and deliciously alluring aspect within the closeted spaces of the film, Viridiana's aura shifts from one of seductive Catholic innocence to another of breathtaking and secular immanence and self-responsibility. Her latent transformation within the film also bears on the critical impact of *Viridiana* when it is seen today. Buñuel's feature locates and analyzes in the same figure a religious icon, a commodity, and a film-fetish. In an uncanny way it both sums up and rehearses the scenarios on which Pedro Almodóvar capitalizes after the end of the Francoist regime.[9] Commodity-fetishes, like Almodóvar's cinema, are available everywhere in a global marketplace. The sign of that future is glimpsed under the arcade of the remote pueblo in an innocuous but decisive moment of Buñuel's film. It is an instant at once within and outside of the originary world of incarceration and savage claustration.

Notes

1. Such are the guiding principles of Michel de Certeau in "L'opération historiographique" (see ch. 2 of *L'écriture de l'histoire*).

2. Pyschogeography is not used in the sense that Debord and the Situationists coined the term. In *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* Deleuze writes of strange effects

obtained from the dislocation of speech in the field of the image, and it is here where psychogeography might be grasped through what the philosopher calls stratigraphy. A break between what is seen and what is heard on screen "also affects the visual image that happens to reveal spaces of any-kind-whatsoever, empty or disconnected spaces of modern cinema. It is as if, speech being retracted from the image in order to become a grounding act, the image, on its side, were bringing forward the grounding of space, the 'foundations,' these mute powers that come before or after speech, before or after the advent of man. The visual image becomes *archeological, stratigraphic, tectonic*" (317; these and other translations from the French and Spanish are mine). The quotation is taken at length because Buñuel's films seem to haunt the very words with which Deleuze describes the stratigraphy of modern cinema.

3. Followed here is the order of the sequential description that Vicente Sánchez-Biosca proposes in his excellent *Luis Buñuel. "Viridiana": Estudio crítico* (23–28). Sánchez-Biosca divides the film into twenty-eight narrative units, the credits not included. Reference to them will be made in the text above.

4. The infinitesimal but decisive gap in continuity attests to a "free indirect subjectivity" of Buñuel's film. The point of view on Viridiana's departure is at once ours, that of the camera, and possibly Don Jaime's. Summing up the concept that he takes from Pasolini, Deleuze notes that such an image engages a correlation of perception in and of the image with a consciousness of the camera. The "free indirect subjectivity" is found, says Pasolini, where the camera waits for a character to enter the frame, to do or say something, and then to leave while the image holds on the space that has become void (*L'image-mouvement* 108).

5. Our voyeuristic fantasies that duplicate Rita's in the ninth sequence have a telling analogue in the thirteenth. When Viridiana finds the beggars in front of the church, she lifts a baby into her arms. When she brings it upward, its buttocks are bared so clearly that the shot elicits our own prurience that it no sooner calls into question.

6. The smoke is not merely an atmospheric element that the camera passively registers in the space of the square. An allegorical reading would have Viridiana "fuming" over what just happened, and a cinematic view would link the wisps of smoke to two atmospheric articulations. One, outside, would be the world at large and the space of history, a world that is not originary. The other, inside, would anticipate the meeting with Jorge (sequence 14) in which the natural son smokes a cigar so flagrantly that the heroine is obliged to open an adjacent window in order to breathe. The correlation of effects in minor and major articulation is a pertinent trait in Buñuel's cinema. Already in *Un chien andalou* the striations of the razor that cuts the eye at the beginning resemble in a miniature way the keys of the piano, seen later in the film, on which the enucleated cadaver of the donkey is placed. See shots 12 and 141 in Jenaro Talens's *El ojo tachado: Lectura de "Un chien andalou" de Luis Buñuel* (148, 177).

7. The driver's everyday gesture repeats that of the driver of the horse-drawn vehicle who offered to take Viridiana's valise in the second sequence. Doubling, repetition, and gestural rhyming are everywhere in the film.

8. The first close-up of Rita's feet skipping rope points to the two objects that convey, as Sánchez-Biosca notes, much of the narrative pattern: the rope and

the isolated feet. In its recurrences in the film—as the instrument of Don Jaime's suicide, an object dear to the murderous fantasies of the underworld, etc.—its "aparente inutilidad narrativa, correlato de su enorme y enigmática capacidad evocadora, demuestra que la cuerda, en cuanto objeto, símbolo, recurrencia poética, es un elemento de cohesión estructural del filme" (*Luis Buñuel* 57). Yet the rope itself is a sign of the narrative as such, the very *thread* by which the two disparate panels of the film are tied together. "Pardon, attention au fil!" said the reporter at the outset of Jean Renoir's *La règle du jeu*, both to fend off the crowd at Le Bourget that welcomed the arrival of the hero-aviator but also to warn us of the intricate pattern of the narrative to follow (Curchot, *Jean Renoir* 37). In *Viridiana* the rope is both a symbol and a sign that bears on the economy of the film. Rita jumps rope by skipping and crossing her feet in a manner of parallels and crossovers. Such is the formal design of the film in its parallel and interlaced parts.

9. How Spanish cinema copes with the creative paradox of constraint and freedom after the end of the Franco regime is a topic central to John Hopewell's groundbreaking *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco*. In "Between History and Dream: Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena*," Santos Zunzunegui shows how, from an array of scattered impressions, "a thick tapestry is woven" (140) to indicate creation emerging from a milieu of repression. The space and its junctures in *Viridiana* seem to be decisive for what Erice and other filmmakers will do with the milieus they film.

4

El espíritu de la colmena
Memory, Nostalgia, Trauma
(Víctor Erice, 1973)

Chris Perriam

Introduction

—"Poco a poco irá olvidando . . ."
(Little by little she'll begin to forget . . .)

El espíritu de la colmena (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) is a film whose density of reference, austere visual and aural pleasures and frissons, and disturbing combination of insight into childhood fears and fantasies with analyses of adult dysfunction and historical disaster might in themselves explain the very large amount of critical work and journalistic commentary that it has attracted internationally. This essay makes use of a good deal of this prior critical work, but it is suggested that readers also try to refer to some of the following basic guides (in descending order of depth of coverage): in Spanish, Pena and Arocena (77–188); in English, Higginbotham, Hopewell, and Stone (87–94). A useful basic outline of what happens on screen is offered by Susan Martín-Márquez:

The translation of the quotations is mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Fig. 4. Ana (Torrent) and Isabel (Tellería) in *El espíritu de la colmena*. Courtesy of Mercury Video Films S.A.U.

> The film's images gravitate around Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez), a self-absorbed, obsessive student of bees, his wife Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), preoccupied with an unspecified person to whom she sends letters via a Red Cross address in France, and the couple's two daughters, six-year-old Ana (Ana Torrent) and her sister Isabel (Isabel Tellería), three years her senior. The fragmentary plot shuffles glimpses of the family's daily activities with actions propelled by the girls'—and especially Ana's—viewing of James Whale's film *Frankenstein,* which takes place early on in the narrative. (*Feminist Discourse* 200)

To this we need to add four linked elements in the plot: (1) A man dressed like a soldier leaps from a moving train (a train that is the daily focus of interest of the children and of Teresa), injures his leg, staggers to a dark barn in the middle of an empty field, is subsequently found by Ana, may be a member of the *maquis* (the resistance), and is located and shot by the authorities; (2) Fernando finds out that Ana has been visiting the fugitive and has given him one of her father's coats, containing his fob-watch, and, at the barn, he attempts to confront her; (3) Ana runs away from her father and goes missing, collapses exhausted in the lee of a ruined monumental gateway, and has a nightmare in which Frankenstein's

monster vividly appears to her in a gothic, moonlit woodland by a dark pool; (4) When she is found she is in profound shock, will not or cannot recognize her parents, speak, or eat, and at the end of the film she is still hallucinating.

A useful summary of common critical reactions is offered by Willem:

> [A]djectives such as elusive, mysterious, ambiguous, haunting, and evocative [are used] to describe [the film]. Contributing greatly toward this ethereal quality are three aspects of the film frequently cited [. . .]: Luis Cuadrado's cinematography, Pablo García del Amo's editing, and Luis de Pablo's music. Through the artistry of sight and sound, the atmospheric quality of the film is created: the use of color and design to suggest the beehive motif in the house; shooting the countryside from low angles to emphasize its flatness and desolation; the chiaroscuro effect of shadow and light to add to the mystery and danger; the elliptical editing to cause temporal confusion; the use of children's songs and drawings to establish the point of view; the simple melodic lines conveyed by few instruments to reinforce the loneliness; and the sound of the wind to stress the isolation. (724)

Such an account suggests a densely textured artwork, full of effects and allusions, drawing on different filmic genres. Additionally, it is now commonplace to frame discussions of the film with allusions to its high cultural status, for example, as "one of the few undisputed canonical texts in Spanish cinema but also a radical film" (Deleyto 39), and as "the undisputed masterpiece of Spanish cinema [a]ppreciated worldwide for its poetic sensibility and profound investigation into the mind and imagination of its child protagonist" (Stone 87), while Erice himself is written of as a key Spanish auteur (*Banda Aparte*; Higginbotham, *Spirit of the Beehive* 8–12 and 40–42; and, from a revisionary perspective, Smith "Between Metaphysics").

However, Hopewell (*Out of the Past* 207–8), Arocena (85–88), and Stone (88–89) typically want to emphasize not only artistry and atmosphere but also simplicity and transparency. The film's realistic, if laconic, depiction of the everyday life in a village in Castile one year into the post-Civil War era contributes to its impact for these critics. So too does the satisfying, apparent certainty with which many of its scenes and much of its plot can be decoded as largely having reference to the social, political, and psychological effects of the early years of the Francoist regime. It should be borne in mind, however, that the mapping

of the film's signs onto actual history is far from direct, and to suppose that it is directly referential in such a way would be to distort or sideline other readings (Egea).

Erice's approach to the taboo subject of the catastrophic polarization of the vanquished and the vanquishers, of the before and after of a nation multiply divided, is emphasized by most of the overview studies of the film from Hopewell onwards as contributing substantially to its status as a cultural icon. The "spirit" of its title is in part the ghost of the Civil War, one of the ghosts of the Spanish past to whom Jo Labanyi, writing from the perspective of theorizations of cultural memory, persuasively suggests viewers and readers are called on to "bear witness" and "make reparation" (80). The war ended in 1939—a year ago in the narrative space of the film—with the victory of the Nationalist forces under the command of General Francisco Franco, who went about the task of constructing an artificially unitary "Spain." The outcome of this episode of violence in whose psychological and cultural fallout the film unfolds included: executions, imprisonment, external and internal exile for Republican militants and sympathizers; the application of a highly repressive form of reactionary, patriarchal patterning of family and society; and the exacerbation of rural isolation and poverty. This conformed personal, social, and cultural expression at many levels (Neuschäfer). Furthermore, as Hopewell has suggested, the Civil War

> predetermined [a postwar period] when [. . .] many Spaniards co-operated with causes with which they did not identify [. . .] saw themselves defined by actions which they could not always recognize as their own [and] suffered the consequences of events they had never experienced and, being in the historical past, could not hope to change. (*Out of the Past* 25)

Hopewell may have had in mind here Erice's own declarations in the introduction to the 1976 published script (relayed by Luis Arata in a rather stilted translation):

> for those of us born immediately after a civil war like ours, the [older generation] were often just [. . .] a vacuum, an absence [. . .] because they had died, left, or become self-centred beings [. . .] deprived [. . .] of expression [. . .]. Many returned to their homes, had children, but something remained ingrained in them, something deeply mutilated which reveals an absence. (Arata 28)

This set of statements had already made a connection between the outward history of oppression and other, more hidden, internalized stories. Erice came back to these ideas more tersely in a thirtieth-anniversary interview for *The Guardian*—"the politics are important [but] interiorised [. . .] the narrative has to be allusive, indirect" (Lennon)—and they illustrate Hopewell's suggestion that "Ana's story is open to psychological, cinematic, and historical readings, all of which naturally overlap" (*Out of the Past* 205).

In the first decade or so of its life in distribution and in university courses the two main directions taken in academic criticism remained somewhat separate: one was psychological, investigating the socialization of and the particular vision of children (Arata; Riley); and the other was allegorical, emphasizing politics and sexual politics (Camina; Savater; Evans). Important to both lines of enquiry is the figure of the monster. If, as Deleyto says, the film has a "radical" quality (39), this comes in part from the daring simplicity with which its allegorical structuring is achieved, particularly with regard to that emblem of mutilation and inability to express (picking up on Erice's words via Arata, quoted above) which is the spirit/monster at the core of the film's structuring. Famously, in the opening episode of the film, the child protagonist Ana and her older sister Isabel watch, wide-eyed, in the village hall, a showing of Whale's *Frankenstein* and, in particular, the scene by the lake with the monster emerging from the bushes to play with but subsequently seize and drown the little girl María. Isabel, pressed for an explanation of the monster's actions and of why the villagers killed the monster, improvises in whispers that night in bed what for Ana becomes the compelling explanation that, quite apart from film being untrue anyway, the monster cannot have died because he was in fact a spirit, and the body consequently a mere disguise; moreover, there is a spirit moving locally by night—to see him, or evoke him, all Ana has to do is intone her name. This implantation of fantasy and dread moves through the substance of the film in many complicated directions, but in one direct way—beyond the children's realm—*Frankenstein* is used to comment on, if not Spain, at least society and its primary ethical struggles. Similarly, although never unequivocally—as Pena points out (69)—an analogy between the monster and Fernando suggests itself.

When Fernando returns to his study after his excursion to the hives on the bright-lit mountainside, he leaves off reading his news magazine (its name, *El Mundo*, reminding the spectator of the world beyond Spain) to attend to the sound track of the horror film, floating in through his windows. The talk is of the piecing together of the monster, of the potential for good and the inevitability and transmissibility of evil

(for the brain that has been used by Dr. Frankenstein in his experiment is a criminal brain). Marsha Kinder observes that "the film implies that the children of Franco would turn out to be like the children of Frankenstein" (*Blood Cinema* 129). No early audience of Erice's film is likely, either, to have failed to pick up the link between Dr. Frankenstein's name and that of the dictator, and the analogy could be taken at least as far as to emphasize the monstrousness of Franco's original enterprise. It is also conceivable that the monster himself could represent for some a tragically botched recreation of Spain, emerging amoral and amnesiac (Higginbotham, *Spanish Film* 116–20), a Spain of several nations artificially patched together, a flawed enterprise based on borrowed ideologies coming out of fascist thought, the Spanish Imperial past, the teachings of the Vatican, conservative notions of family and home, and, later in the dictatorship, from the pages of economists' textbooks. Or perhaps the monster's body might grotesquely stand in for the mutilated and tortured bodies of the recent war—as Labanyi suggests in her illuminatingly nuanced discussions of the meanings of the monster (76–78), "the monster stands as the embodiment, which returns to haunt the present, of a collective living death" (76).

It is the staging and setting of this embodiment in a space of resonance that allows the film so compellingly to link social, psychological, historical and fantasy materials. In this haunting of the present, history (in part) becomes a "presencia autónoma" (independent presence) constructed out of Spanish audiences' collective cultural memory, affective reflection, and (resuming an old critical topos) the physical setting—the house and the landscape—as a "sentimental landscape of sadness and solitude" (Lomillos 58).

Memory and Remembering

There is one especially important act of remembering to be done at this stage in this chapter: that is, to bring back to the surface of the visual and auditory imagination the film's atmosphere of desolation, and the realization that it is reminiscent of that atmosphere peculiar to the aftermath of shock and catastrophe: nearly empty landscapes, semi-ruined and ruined spaces; muted colors; a baldly repetitive insistence on "los grandes misterios de la creación—la vida y la muerte" (the great mysteries of creation: life and death) (as the compeer to the James Whale film puts it); and above all, as de Ros reveals, a "pervasive feeling of silence," "instances of loss of intelligibility," sparse dialogue (33), and a "disjunction of sound and image [causing] the subtle estrangement of these two

senses" (36). Some of this pervasive feeling may well carry over from Erice's first intention of making a film whose main theme would be the political situation in early-1970s Spain tackled allegorically through the return of the monster to a Spain that resembles a concentration camp run by technocrats and through the setting of the action in a space that was to have been a cross between a hospital and a library, or film archive (the critic Antonio Castro qtd. in Arocena 78). The archive and the wound, memoir and pain, are thrown together by the return of the monstrous. The film reconstructs a posttraumatic space around wounds that may never heal (Pena, *Víctor Erice* 114). It stages a series of possible reactions to and interpretations of the state of Spain, on the one hand, and a state of mind, on the other hand, connected to horror, nightmare, vicarious remembrance, the loss of innocence, and the perversion of paternal love into deadness, inscrutability, and blank authority. In a manner whose obscurity, temporal discontinuity, illogicality, and ungraspability are appropriate to the symptoms of trauma (Caruth; LaCapra 718–19), the film sporadically crossmatches Ana's crisis to a nation's crisis, and in her "discovery" of the damaged fugitive links her to a history of strife and violent exclusion. It is concerned with historical trauma; and it is also, inextricably, concerned with structural—psychic—trauma[1] in Ana, Teresa, Fernando, and Isabel, while also leaving on the viewer's imagination the ghostly imprint of something that surely does not actually lie in the past, some unrepresentable and unrealized abuse of Ana that goes far beyond and before her father's disciplinary and dysfunctional aloofness. Her hysterical silence and the hallucinatory illness, which, at the end of the film, she is only just in the midst of, will be returned to later. But first, to memory and to the ways in which the film remits to the past, over and over again, in a series of visual and aural references; or in words that have direct reference to the Holocaust, to the ways in which "the space of the concentrationary universe [. . .] can only be represented traumatically as the registration of a repetitive structure of time" (Rothberg 99–100). Thinking about trauma, as well as about memory and nostalgia, can help maintain a proper dynamic between, in Smith's terms, "reference and abstraction" ("Between Metaphysics" 112). If this film looks and sounds as it does, it is both because something multifarious and terrible has happened and because that something echoes phantom feelings in the person who sees and hears the emptiness and beauty here, feelings that reconstruct themselves after the (represented) event as memories that possess her.

Although there has been a tendency to suggest that the temporal structuring of the film is itself very complex—views that are summarized and reviewed by Smith ("Whispers")—in fact the superstructure has two

very simple, linear stories running in parallel over a number of days, or possibly weeks (though visibly contained within one climatically homogenous early or late winter season): that of Ana's fantasy episode and its development, and that of her parents' continuing act of survival in the aftermath of the war seen through the prism of the same period. There is little here to suggest the exercise of Rothberg's registration of repetition. Similarly, the two explicit acts of remembering that give texture to the plot are recorded as linear stories: Fernando's recording in his diary of his memory of a long-ago day when an unnamed friend came to the house to watch the behavior of the bees with him, and Teresa's writing of one of her letters to an absent man in which she records the changes that have occurred since he was forced to leave Spain and (more enigmatically) since he was last in the house. Here, though, the registration of repetition does begin to break into the linearity. Fernando's recourse to his diary is soon revealed as part of his habit of seeking reclusion in his study: the film makes a habit of putting the study windows center frame at crucial moments of transition, the words have a rehearsed, literary feel to them—indeed, Fernando may be not simply remembering but inventing a poeticized memory.[2] His writing, and his attention to the bees, has an intention of exorcism and, for the viewer, a therapeutic effect. Teresa's writing too is habitual, a way of filling the emptiness of the present and inscribing the act of survival (Arocena 108–9), and the one text we see (and hear in voice-over) is structured around a linguistic reiteration—of "tantas ausencias [. . .] tanta tristeza [que] se fue nuestra capacidad de sentir" ("so many absences [. . .] so much sadness [that] our capacity for feeling has deserted us"). Teresa's letter is concerned with creating a memoir in which she hopes to confirm the impossibility of nostalgia, which, as she writes, is a feeling that is difficult to have after what they have all lived through: when she burns a subsequent letter she defies the destructive power of constantly returning memories, of "so many" annihilating events and emotions.[3] Yet they return.

Underlying the stories of Ana and her parents are a number of distinctly nonlinear patterns. The ellipses and discontinuities that Pena and Smith remind us of (*Víctor Erice* and "Whispers") are operational in both stories; Ana acts as a prism that fragments her, and therefore the viewer's, perception of the intradiegetic world (Stone 88), and the marker of most of the re-entries to the episodic tale of her mental and real adventure is an image of her (that is, the young Ana Torrent's) hypnotic stare, both registering and inducing the thrill of her fugues into fantasy. Crucially, for example, there is an ambiguity around the reality status of the subnarreme of the fugitive's arrival by train, which is constructed by a memorable dissolve to the sequence from one of Ana closing her

eyes as she wills the spirit into existence in the garden of the house one gothic night. The back histories of her parents are made discontinuous and vague. Teresa is sidelined and the substance of her character reduced, violently in Deleyto's reading, and Fernando's place in history is uncertain both on the smaller scale (he is scolded by the housekeeper for never keeping the same mealtimes as the rest of the family) and the wider (his university background seems to align him with the intellectual left, but his current behavior—as indeed the seigneurial manor in which he lives—with the patriarchal right). Both parents are, according to Erice's stated intention, shadowy (Arocena 102). For the viewer, reconstructing the substance of these characters is, like the double act of memory itself (conscious and unconscious), a difficult, unpredictable, and discontinuous piece of emotional labor.

Furthermore, the two prologues to the film—the arrival of the traveling cinema and the prologue of *Frankenstein* within the film (Deleyto 40)—are supplemented and anticipated by the static visual synopsis of a sequence of a child's drawings showing the key symbols and plot movers of the film; and the film's first words, in subtitle, are the archetypal "Érase una vez . . ." ("Once upon a time . . ."), prompting diffuse memories of tales once heard and pictures once enjoyed in the seeing or the drawing. Spanish viewers have their aural memories prompted too by the pastiche of folk songs and children's songs that makes up Luis de Pablo's score; and Spanish readers pick up on the half-resonance with the opening of *Don Quixote* in the continuation of the establishing subtitles, as many academic critics have been quick to point out, up to and including Stone (88). Similar half-resonances are later revealed of the preoccupations with the central Spanish landscape as the bearer of the traces of history of writers of the Generation of 1898, whose ghostly presence is signaled by visual references to Unamuno (see Pena, *Víctor Erice* 60–63), the general thematic of Castile in the wake of periods of exodus and national catastrophe, attention to landscapes of ruins and signs of past grandeur (like Fernando's home), fields as past battlegrounds, and inhabitants who (especially in one oddly choreographed scene outside the village hall as the film is getting underway inside) move as might have done the "atónitos palurdos" (dumbstruck rustics) seen by the speaker of the poem "A orillas del Duero" ("On the Banks of the Duero") in Antonio Machado's *Campos de Castilla* (1917). The film, then, bears a number of possible, significant, textual memories suggesting return and repetition.

The reflexivity of the film, examined by Linda Willem and Thibaudeau (following a longish line of other critics interested in the issue), also gives it an archival inflection. As Thibaudeau observes, not only does Erice's film refer back to *Frankenstein* but the reference refers

the viewer to the whole genre of fantasy film, "perhaps" nostalgically on the part of Erice (16). De Ros expands substantially the field of operation of memory by suggesting that, as part of the film's "[interrogation of] the constructed nature of cinematic representation" (27), it "illuminates the different inflections that the visual and the aural may have in cinema and the ways their boundaries can be transgressed or can form alternative alliances within the prevailing order of knowledge" (32) (thus—though De Ros is too subtle to say so outright—abetting the film's attack on Francoism). The viewer is reminded, in fact, of the history of cinema, and of the transition—located in this case as a memory within a memory, in the figure of the silent monster, a "misfit [. . .] in the flourishing world of the talkies" (34)—from silent films to sound.

The locations and interiors of the film invite the viewer to follow in the footprints of memory. Absent, suppressed referents abound: if the long road emphatically featured leading off into the harsh landscape and the railway, and its sounds, are taunting reminders within the film of a world outside, they both (the road with its bicycle and cart; the train with its steam and whistle) signal pastness to the viewer as much as remoteness of freedom to, say, Teresa. The sparsely populated village is an empty archive of former community and activity; the vast ruined and isolated arch where Ana is tracked down at the height of her crisis goes back further still; and most of all the echoing family house, whose many resonances are picked out by Evans and Molina Foix.[4] This is a house presided over by a father who is alienated to the point of insensitivity and despotism where his wife and his children are concerned, an intellectual at the centre of a house coded by its windows and passageways (and the title of the film) as a hive, reduced by circumstance to keeping bees whose main reference drifts back and forth between the terms of entrapment, meaningless activity, the production of nightmares, and the production of the sweet substance of dreams.

Molina Foix's careful and brilliant reading of the house-related imagery gives rise to the suggestion that the film be read above all in terms of absence, making it a space of forgetting as much as of memory. The characters are immersed in unreality, or the absence of reality, obliged by the Civil War and its aftermath to absent themselves from reality and live through dead and empty hours: the presence of the war is made conspicuous by precisely this, it is "a presence based on an absence" (112). The light that characterizes the interior shots, he suggests (115), is a filtered, "censored" light offering little contrast, and seems to correspond to the muffling and damping down of all passionate exchange between the characters. Indeed, as he demonstrates through an analysis of fram-

ing and editing, there is more communication by the adults with absent others than between themselves or with their daughters (113–14).

The house contributes notably to the sense of the film's being full of memorials to the past and to survival and mortality. It is heavily coded with pastness, even in and precisely because of the emphatic absence of many of the objects it once held (as, again, Teresa's paradoxically full letter tells the viewer): an allegorical painting of Saint Jerome in the baroque style, skull in the foreground, refers to lessons of the past on the vanity of earthly things; the fortifications of the house from which Teresa calls out Ana's name recall pre-Renaissance frontier battles; the furniture is an overlaid archive of several generations, heavy with the traces of wealth and ambition now proven vain. The ruined monumental gateway that serves as Ana's Freudianly appropriate place of crisis[5] remits to frontier times once more (and can easily be imagined to have served as a frontline post or snipers' favored location in the more recent war); the open fields, as has been suggested, might look back to iconic representations of Castile as core of the nation at two moments in literary history; the schoolhouse where Ana and Teresa attend class is, on a shorter timescale, not just a place where multiplication tables are memorized and knowledge is laid down but one whose treatment, as Marsha Kinder suggests, establishes it as a strong image of the specificity of daily existence at a particular time in history (*Blood Cinema* 129–33).

One of the key memorial sites of the film is the isolated barn, not least because it is eventually the place where the fugitive is shot and dies and is intuitively known as such subsequently by Ana, for whom it becomes an integral part of her traumatic experience. After a class in basic anatomy in which a metal man is pieced together, like Frankenstein's monster, and lastly given eyes to see, Isabel takes Ana out to show her this barn for the first time to open her own eyes to the mystery of the spirit. The contextualizing importance of the sequence that leads from school to barn is considerable and moves away from the spaces of memory into those of nostalgia and trauma, since what is at stake is a combination of loss of innocence, the discovery of an unbearable connectedness between the real and the imaginary, and a vertiginous conflation of painful images for Ana and for the viewer.

Nostalgia

As is suggested in Pierre Nora's project *Les lieux de mémoire*, on France's reconstruction of its identity around sites and monuments specifically

invested with the intention to remember, "collective memory emerges" (in Nancy Wood's gloss on Nora) as a " 'symbolic topography' or 'dynamic ensemble' of diverse representational forms, both material and immaterial in nature, that articulate the heritage of a given community" (3). As we have seen, *El espíritu de la colmena* is not only replete with memory referents but is a major part of Spanish cultural heritage as well as forming part of the ensemble of forms that students of Spanish culture take as access points to more or less nuanced readings of its relation to the sociopolitical realities of the period 1939–1975. It stands as a dynamic memorial. In particular, for those who lived through the war, and perhaps exile, and who saw the film in its early years of circulation, it must surely have been a reminder of their experience. For certain audiences, then, it is a reminder of how, as Wood has it, quoting Joëlle Bahloul:

> [the] "uprooted memories" of a diasporic community [. . .] must compensate for their lack of access to their own *lieux de mémoire* [. . .] by summoning memories whose key locus is the very spatial parameters from which the community is physically excluded. Surcharged memories of places—especially domestic spaces—are "part of the syndrome of exile"; they are an "embodiment of the life cycle" and therefore an "embodiment of genealogy"—highly cathected substitutes for the physical traces of lineage their bearers have been forced to abandon; their function is to "erase deracination by recreating genealogical loci." (177)

The house in Erice's film, with its many chambers, and the long perspectives opened up as doors reveal corridors and light (as the children play, in the temporary absence of the father, who blocks the play of imagination), is just such a space of surcharged memories; as are the Castilian fields and ruins and the rundown pueblo itself. Although the match between the (Algerian) diasporic community being discussed by Bahloul and the more fragmented Spanish exile community is not a direct one, the film certainly presents a dynamic ensemble of places that, in substituting for the lost "traces of lineage," recreates a space of continuity—not just for political exiles and their heirs but also for viewers possessed by a more generalized sense of loss. However, while offering the possibility of continuity by revitalizing genealogy in this way (through substitution) and by reopening a way into the future, the ensemble of places would also seem to be powerfully nostalgic objects in the sense of "condensations of childhood values, derivatives of early fantasies that are used to idealize the past, preventing movement towards the future" (Harvey A. Kaplan qtd. in Wood 145–46). Thus, the film is a space where the spirit might move the viewer in either temporal direction.

The very look of the film makes it in itself an object of nostalgia, particularly for post-1980s audiences attuned to the possibility of a Spanish heritage movie. An unnuanced viewing of this film concentrated on the visual traces of period typicality (buildings, costumes, customs) might move quickly toward simply taking pleasure in pastness as commodity (leaving no scope for a future-oriented production of a space for continuity) and might risk what Nora terms patrimonialization, where the past is a virtually autonomous moment, a "localized heritage, claimed as the cornerstone of one's singular identity" (Wood 176). A more complex, though equally problematic and nostalgic, framing of the film is exemplified in a lyrical review in the otherwise usually sober journal *Dirigido*, which regrets its own inability to fulfill its mission of remembering the film appropriately because everything has already been said on it: the critical voice (Monterde) finds itself excluded from participation in the once available plenitude of dialogue with the admired object. The film is figured here as a "light" not yet extinguished and a space of "initiation" (Monterde, "*El espíritu*" 98), a trajectory from darkness to the revelation of a myth of unity, the realization of "our" inevitable loss of innocence and exile from this space, the revelation of the pain of consciousness, but also of the need to satisfy the quest for knowledge (99). In a twenty-fifth anniversary special dossier in *Banda Aparte* abounding in auteurist and aestheticist accounts, a similar perspective has the film's construction of a possible alternative "world" through Ana affirm at the end her "verdad interior" (inner truth) (Laínez 56). Both these brief critical raptures are good examples of the urge to abstraction that Smith ("Between Metaphysics") seeks to counterbalance (while also duly preserving) in his arguments for a coherent synthesis of the historical and the poetic in encounters with the film.

Despite the seductive magic of the film—Laínez reminds us of the drawing of a magician in the opening titles, which denotes the trickery of illusion (55); see also de Ros on this issue (36)—the children in the film do not, or at least should not, easily invite idealizing readings of childhood as a space of innocence, as Martín-Márquez shows in her analysis of Isabel and as Deleyto shows in his of Ana and Teresa as two aspects of rebellion (*Feminist Discourse* 49–51). If we posit Ana not so much as a child but as a figure with a maternal aura—following one of three lines of thought prompted by the objects on the children's bedside table (a picture of the Madonna, a candle, a toy monkey, signaling spiritual maternity, enlightenment, childhood mischief)—we may investigate precisely a nostalgia that negotiates the line between screening off the past, preventing movement into the future, on the one side, and accessing continuity on the other. It is a nostalgia for redemption that the film perhaps most powerfully provokes through Ana (principally, but not solely),

a nostalgia both conforming and not conforming to the classic sense of "serving the function of denial and of a defence against, and substitute for, mourning" (Wood 145), given that the lost object here, the object susceptible to recovery, is composed of an operation (impossible really), which in theological terms erases spiritual exile, returns the people to the light, renews, guarantees, and perpetuates.[6]

It is Ana's communication with the absent Spirit that enables a passionate involvement of the viewers as community in the activity of breaking out of the structures of the patriarchal hive. Martín-Márquez's feminist reading (developing ideas of Mary Ann Doane) of Ana's encounters with the monster implies that the film is empowering in that Ana as the female protagonist is prompted by her curiosity to take investigative action (to find her monster) and thus take control of the gaze. Her moments of empathy with the monster allow recognition by the female spectator, as suggested by Linda Williams, of its similar status as "other" in a patriarchal society, and they allow the uncovering of the workings of that structure of power (Martín-Márquez, *Feminist Discourse* 222). Ana only avoids victimhood in this reading, however, through the way her sister Isabel (who teeters on the verge of mischief and evil throughout) "takes on the truly monstrous role, conforming to expected female behaviors under patriarchy" (Martín-Márquez, *Feminist Discourse* 229), and is positioned "to play both victim and monster" (228), the first because of her socialization and connectedness with representations of the monstrous feminine, and the second ostensibly through her spiteful play (with the black cat she starts to throttle, and with Ana, to whom she feigns death and disappearance at the hands of an intruder).

In these ways Ana is a role model, and more political in her connotations than spiritual. The film's open ending, however, does not entirely allow the spectator to make so rational a decision about her role and the meanings attaching to her. As the lights go down in Fernando's study, his own careful, metaphysical discourse on the awesome life of the bees is both dimmed and consecrated; the power of the father in the realm of language is both taken from him and restored to him. And as Ana rises from her sick bed, she becomes powerful by resisting the prediction of conventional (patriarchal) medical science—the bearded family doctor's phlegmatic assurance that she will soon forget the whole incident of the "monster" and the refugee. She defies once more both father and common sense as she is absorbed into the gothic poetics of the scene, leaves her bed and goes to the window with moonlight streaming in, conjuring up in her mind the sound of the approaching train and the words of invocation of the spirit, "Soy Ana" ("It's Ana"). At first she is apparently subjugated to the film's symbolic purposes, which might be to signal Freudian or social troubles (or both); but when she turns to face the camera in a

hieratic and dramatic gesture she seems, like a priestess or a white witch, to offer solutions rather than troubles and from a position of dominance challenges those gathered to see the swirling blue mists beyond the window as prefiguring a liberation of the imagination or the spirit. This scene, as much as encouraging an irresponsible nostalgia for dreams of innocence and protectedness, or calling on the viewer to surrender to the powers of horror, demands a reconstruction of the sound of the train as the promise of communication, escape, a new civilization, a future even. The image of Ana insists on being envisaged here as having on behalf of her audience somehow passed through abjection (to anticipate the next and final section of the chapter); to have attempted to confront and expel the disorderly and the horrible and yet to enter into communion with it. She seems to have enacted an exorcism of the past by binding herself to a fantastic substitution of it (making "our" nostalgia redundant). While it is not at all clear into what new history, what new imaginings, this disturbing little figure is gazing on behalf of the viewer, she seems to be in control, and to point the way to new action, interceding. In as much as this is, of course, all an effect of the light, it responds to the material concerns raised by Smith ("Between Metaphysics"), but what truly grounds this nostalgia which is not one is the issue of trauma, and the psychic and historical encounters with horror that backfill so much of the space of the film and responses to it.

Trauma

Although early work by Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, and others on the effects of trauma on human subjects started at the level of the damaged individual, and although as late as 1998 it was possible for the presenter of a special issue of the journal *Diacritics* on the subject to state directly that trauma theory is a "branch of psychoanalysis" (Jacobus 3), the traumatized family, community, and nation are, as is well known, categories of growing significance. The interdisciplinary critical literature on the social aftereffects of the Holocaust (among other major genocides, conflicts, and catastrophes) continues to grow (Whitehead; Rothberg), and the volume on the politics of memory in the Spanish context to which Labanyi has contributed reflects the emphasis of her piece on the embodiment of the past and the bridging across from psychoanalytical concerns to historical ones via a rethinking—through the trope of ghostliness in Labanyi's case—of "the current postmodern obsession with simulacra" (65; also 80). Trauma theory, as well as being inextricably involved in the politics, politicization, and rehistoricization of memory, suggests Kai Erikson, "takes account of events that happen [. . .] in the intimacy of the family and

in the ambiguously interpersonal or social dimensions of sexuality where events intersect with issues involving gender, power, and powerlessness as well as with pre-existing psychic structures"; "trauma has a social dimension" (185), and there are "social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit" (190). Particularly, Thomas Elsaesser points out that trauma theorists "want to articulate a theory of the subject not around desire and its constitutive lack (the Freud-Lacanian route), but around memory and its—politically enforced, patriarchally inflicted—gaps, absences, and traceless traces" (194).

The difficulties of bringing issues of trauma into the social, collective, and even cognitive spheres are not inconsiderable, however. As Cathy Caruth notes, "in trauma, the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it [and] immediacy may take the form of belatedness" (5); trauma's "refusal to be simply located" and its "insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (8) make it a difficult matter to cope with in any attempt at mapping the numbing, achronological, paradoxically inaccessible experience of it onto histories, whether personal, collective, national, recorded, or represented. Erice's film's use of ellipsis, simultaneity, dislocation, and deferral reproduces this difficulty; and it does so in a way that ought to disallow the normalizing matching up of meanings by encouraging a genuine attention to disjunctures, rather than to equivalences (Egea 526–27).

Nonetheless, if only to open up more gaps, it is worth asking: could Ana's way of viewing the monster stand for a common experience of fear and coping with fear, a common structure and attempted structuring of trauma? Thinking back to the first moments at the isolated barn, Ana is caught in a waking nightmare of loss and absence that is later to be intensely internalized, but she is also caught up in a deindividualized moment, a common premonition of death and absorption into the other. The abstract foreboding of the blowing winds (an aural image that in effect defocalizes and despecifies) and the archetypicality of the deep, dark well ritualize the moment. The barn becomes a sacred space (Arocena 130), first of communion (as Ana tends to the fugitive) then of sacrifice (when he is shot), then of shocked and interrupted mourning (when Ana discovers the cruel repetition of the absence of the spirit she is seeking and—when Fernando finds her there—the unbearable return of the possibility that he is the more powerful manifestation of the spirit with which he has been associated by sound and image [Arocena 147–50]). However, that sacredness is defiled, brutally reinserted into history, by the shooting, since this turns the space retrospectively into that of a condemned cell, and presently into that of an execution chamber—it becomes part of the film's concentrationary universe, to reapply Rothberg's terms. Ana's empty

space, after the death, is the empty space of a numbed nation. The event of the shooting, filmed in the dark and at several hundred meters, has a horrifying familiarity to it. It is a historical reiteration that deepens the sense of the iterative structures of the film that link individual and collective experience, as studied by Kinder (*Blood Cinema* 126–32). To Labanyi's stress on the reinsertion of the fugitive into history through Ana's hospitality toward him, as a ghost of the past, we need, in a traumatic reading, to add a consideration of the resistance to such temporal relocation that is written into the traumatic memory. This ghost, having been ushered back into the realm of the present, again disappears for Ana—subject to Rothberg's "registration of a repetitive structure of time"—since the body in the improvised chapel is literally unknowable to her; and the twice-dead subject is once again dispersed among different figurations of monstrousness, pulling away from embodiment; but the emotional pain caused to the viewer by that tension draws attention no less sharply to history than to oblivion.

In the schoolroom just before the first visit to the barn, the rudimentary anatomy lesson had drawn the children's attention to the vulnerability of the body, the separability of body parts, and also the connectedness of flesh, feeling, and perception (as the heart and the eyes are put in place, the latter by Ana). It had been precisely anatomy that had centered so many of the early debates on hysteria and reactions to shock and psychic damage, and body image continues to play a major role in the psychoanalysis of trauma (Whitehead 1997); so, when Ana manifests her symptoms in the wake of the double shock of her vicarious and belated discovery of the truth of death (in the evidence of the absence of the *maquisard*) and of her confrontation with her father's anger (at the barn later) they are hysterical symptoms, and traumatic ones in the sense explored by LaCapra, as discussed by Whitehead (191), where " 'acting out' reflects the overwhelming nature of trauma, in which the past has not been assimilated or even experienced and so is perpetually relived." Becoming a fugitive herself, she acts out just such an unlived past; and layer on layer of monstrous images return to haunt the viewer.

One of the greatest difficulties in locating the traumatic in the film is the constant deferral of identification of a traumatized subject, whether collective or individual. Ana—as her symptoms so painfully show—has seen nothing; Fernando is saying nothing; the viewer is not necessarily (especially as time passes) somebody who has witnessed atrocities of war and repression in Spain. It is also, at the very least, questionable that most viewers have had an experience of growing up that is so violent and so hedged about by damaging authority that they are possessed by images that find their correlatives returning in this film. It is as if the past

event at stake here has not even been experienced (as already suggested in a different context by Hopewell, *Out of the Past* 25), or as if events witnessed, remembered, and suppressed have been disconnected from the individuals represented or interpellated (as viewers) and redistributed, by the structures of the fiction, among the characters, places, and objects.

However, in a manner true both to the "radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" (Caruth 2) and to theoretical assertions about the collective nature of trauma, this begins to make sense. If the viewer is frequently dropped into the abyss of Ana's individual point of view by cinematographic and narrative ambiguities, the images remitted to there are images just as much of damage to "the tissues of the community," in Erikson's terms (185); the human beings represented at the bottom of the well of her imagination represent a "gathering of the wounded" (187). And, as we have seen, these images relate (as closely as they do obliquely) to the political meanings of the film. Like the bees in the hives and cages, the wounded are trapped; unlike the bees, though, what traps them is not a perfect (if tyrannical) system—which allows neither sleep nor death, as Fernando recalls revealing to his absent, horrified friend—so much as a new, rigid system imposed on a disrupted society. The film, then, speaks of "memory and its—politically enforced, patriarchally inflicted—gaps, absences and traceless traces" (Elsaesser 194).

It is time now to return to the troubling ghost of a suggestion that Ana's "structural" traumatic trouble has a nonliteral but not for that any less disturbing reference to abuse within the family; that is, the trouble does not relate only to historical trauma at the extradiegetic level of the film (to what the audience remembers of the catastrophe of the war) or to what has happened to the adults in the film, but also to a more individualized set of histories, some of them lived by Ana in character, some of them imaginable (or, rather, unimaginable) for empathizing viewers. Although Martín-Márquez's attention to the figure of Isabel in relation to the structures of horror and Kinder's reminder about the centrality of Ana's response to her viewing of *Frankenstein* were useful correctives to some of the more repetitive symbol-fixated and formalist readings of the film in the critical repertoire, it is also true, as Lomillos suggests, that Ana's adventure is based on her desire to know the "dark and secret world" of the adults around her (59) and that she is compelled to search by the need to replace the emotional and signifying vacuum left by the dysfunction of the family (67).

Lomillos is interested in the space of family as a space of separation, a once or should-be protective space that has become unbearable (59) precisely because it has become an isolating and isolated enclosure. In Teresa's case, her letter writing remits to individual entrapment on

the one hand, as the camera circles her as she writes (as if haunting or stalking her), and to collective loss on the other, as the nonspecificity of the addressee allows him to merge his single identity with that of a whole exiled community. Perhaps she conforms to Pierre Janet's model of elimination of the traumatic memory in a context where it is impossible to "[sustain] theoretically or practically the opposition between forgetting and remembering" (Leys 129). As Deleyto has suggested (40–45), the framing of the scene variously disempowers her; the chiaroscuro points up the emptiness of this space, and she is lit—that is to say defined—by the honey-colored light through the cellular panes that is one of the film's key visual features and that signifies an interior both "real" and psychological, both nurturing and entrapping (Evans, "The Monster" 13). She and Fernando live like the marginalized couple in exile who form part of Inger Agger's studies of traumatized subjects (Agger 103), where the woman makes herself frigid while the man "locks his feelings in" (103). Personal harm and harm to the community criss-cross in them. If Ana, as Smith observes, is the one who is open to, and opens out, revelations "about the role of the Other in the constitution of a sense of self" ("Between Metaphysics" 112) she is also vulnerable through her abnormal socialization to the effects of the discontinuities of others. This is her traumatic inheritance.

The nature of her access to her social self needs, however, to be read against the nature of her access to her sexual self. Recapitulating late 1970s and 1980s Freudian and post-Freudian interpretations of the film, which have complemented the available allegorical readings, Kinder has very properly reminded us that in fact the film "focuses on a child's imaginative reconstruction of images she has seen in a Hollywood movie" (Frankenstein), and on how she "uses the myth to deal with the painful experiences in her own Spanish context [and] especially her interactions with [the] Republican fugitive [. . .] and with her father" (*Blood Cinema* 127). The child, Ana, "is most deeply moved by the sequence from *Frankenstein* in which the monster seems to befriend the little girl Maria" (*Blood Cinema* 128). Ana "[absorbs] both monster and victim as her own doubles, and the primal associations of the love and the violence between them as the deep structure for her own fantasies about the father figures in her life" (128) (that is to say, her actual father and the fugitive). It is almost certainly just such a "deep structure" of associations that is signaled by the perspective down the well by the barn (studied in detail by Pena 85–86), as also in the troubled reflection on the pool in the spookily encoded woodlands in Ana's vivid nightmare. On the run—in tacit mimesis of the monster and the fugitive—she sees, in a fevered dream that may or may not be a waking one, her own reflection

in water again, on a dark pond, and, replacing it, the reflection of the face of Frankenstein's monster, in full color, and indeed there behind her, then kneeling as had the monster next to little Maria by the lake, to hold out his hands to her in a moment frozen between contact and menace. In addition to that hesitation between contact and menace, on first viewing and because of the position of the camera and the two actors, there is also an ambiguity about what the monster is reaching out to touch—whether Ana's breasts or her shoulders. Through her dreaming and in her life, Ana is waking to a sexualized adult self as well as discovering horrors and delights; she is acting out an instinctive attempt at access to what is forbidden, transgressive female sexuality (Deleyto 49). There is, after all, as has been extensively argued (for example in Creed, *Monstruous*), barely a horror film scenario that is not in some sense about sexualized transitions of the body, and in particular of the female body into adolescence and adulthood. As she looks into and onto the dark and obviously symbolic waters (Deleyto 50), Ana is not just placing herself as an individual in relation to real and imagined figures in the world around her (thinking about her father, the "monster," her dreams), but confronting also the hint or the presage of a much more indefinite antagonist. In the darkness and in her reflection—inside her, the suggestion might be—there is horror without name, but framed by sexuality, the family, and the nation.

Julia Kristeva, in her philosophico-poetical explorations of the power of horror in the psychological life of phobic adults, speaks of their relation to horror in terms of an attempt to pass over an untouched and untouchable abyss (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 53) where there is "un 'quelque chose' que je ne reconnais pas comme chose. Un poids de non-sens [. . .] qui m'écrase" ("a 'something' which I do not recognize as a thing at all. A crushing weight of non-sense"), something "not me," and yet "not it" either, unnameable (*Powers of Horror* 9–10). If an object of fear forms in the mind (in the viewer's, or, as in Ana's case, a monster) it does so precisely to give at least some shape to that something which is no thing and which threatens to destroy sanity and integrity of personality. What remains to be seen is whether Ana's fusion with monster, mother, Other, viewer offers the possibility of progress toward closure (whether, that is, the bearded doctor is right when he says that little by little she will start to forget) or whether (when she turns at the end of the film to look back at the viewer) Spanish cultural memory is marked (if "only" vicariously) by the invocation through her of the repetition of horrors of different provenance and of different reality value that are too dispersed—too generalized and yet too unique—to settle into comprehensible narrative, or assimilable sounds and images that all but remain at base traumatic.

Notes

1. For a useful, brief discussion of the distinction and the possible conflation of the two types of trauma, see LaCapra.

2. In a way he is plagiarizing, not inventing: Erice is said to have appropriated to his purposes Maurice Maeterlinck's 1901 essay on *The Life of the Bee* (Higginbotham, *Spirit of the Beehive* 13; Stone 89).

3. Higginbotham floats the possibility of the letter's addressee being the wounded fugitive and her motive fear of the letter's discovery (*The Spirit* 12): this would mean an even more emphatic killing off of the possibility of nostalgia.

4. As Neuschäfer remarks in relation to twentieth-century Spanish literature, one could write a whole history of censorship around the symbol of the isolated, encapsulated house (57).

5. The opening chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents* juxtaposes the archaeology of Rome—the process of building upon ruins—with the archaeology of the mind, similarly layered, but with all the old sites still intact.

6. The film also has its Christ figure in the form of the fugitive. There are narrative resonances of *Whistle Down the Wind* (Brian Forbes, 1961), with its discovery by three children of a fugitive in a barn whom they take at first to be Jesus. Also, after the shooting, the fugitive's corpse is laid out in the village hall, and the "foreshortened perspective of his body [. . .] recalls Renaissance images of the deposition of Christ on the eve of resurrection" (de Ros 36) and the projection screen effectively becomes, in the sequence, a reredos in an improvised chapel. Elliptically, Ana's care for the fugitive is connected to Mary's for Christ.

5

A Poetics of Splitting
Memory and Identity in *La prima Angélica* (Carlos Saura, 1974)

Àngel Quintana

Is Carlos Saura an Author?

In 1969, the philosopher Michel Foucault delivered a conference at the Collège de France in Paris entitled "What Is An author?" These were the years in which structuralism had thrown the very notion of the author into crisis. The author's sacrosanct intention could no longer be considered the mysterious secret that the critic needed to reveal in order to fully understand the significance of that author's work. Foucault considered, however, that the indifference towards the notion of the author that had appeared in certain academic environments did not make sense, since the function of the author in twentieth-century culture had become characteristic of a mode of existence, of systems of circulation and of the working of certain discourses inside of a society. The author should be thought as a label that would allow the homologation of certain cultural products. The French philosopher did not believe in an exegesis that privileged, following the Romantic tradition, the value of the author, but rather, he considered that, when talking about an author, it was important to always

Translated by Zachary Zimmer.

Fig. 5. José Luis López Vázquez as Luis and María Clara Fernández de Loayza as Angélica in *La prima Angélica*. Courtesy of Elías Querejeta P.C.

have in mind his or her presence as a discursive construction (Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" 803).

Foucault's text can be considered a reference for thinking, from our present perspective, the meaning of the European *cinéma d'auteur* of the 1960s beyond the reflections on the personal politics of the filmmakers that, emerging from the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, marked the cinematographic thought of the sixties and seventies. Because of this, the first question we must tackle, before beginning our analysis of a film such as Carlos Saura's *La prima Angélica* (*Cousin Angelica*, 1974), is that of its contextualization within a model that was baptized as *cinéma d'auteur* and soon became the official discourse of quality cinema. This was a system that prescribed a certain way to view cinema and that im-

posed itself upon the general cultural institution thanks to its triumph in the largest film festivals and, above all, thanks to its construction of an important critical apparatus.

Carlos Saura has been, without a doubt, the highest referent of this Spanish *cinéma d'auteur*. The filmmaker broke into and triumphed within the circuit of the European discourse of quality cinema. Beyond the empirical person Carlos Saura Atarés, born in Huesca in 1932, his name eventually turned into a construction for the purpose of spreading a model of Spanish cinema capable of inserting itself within the dominant currents of the 1960s that were paradigmatic of modernity (Brasó 11–14). Saura's label circulated comfortably within the institutional discourses of cinema of the period because it managed to synthesize several formal techniques that were removed from the classical narrative structure, with a process exorcising the ghosts haunting a dictatorship like that of General Franco's. Of all of Saura's films between *La caza* (*The Hunt*, 1965) and *Mamá cumple cien años* (*Mama Turns 100*, 1979), *La prima Angélica* is, perhaps, the one that best summarizes his discursive systems, the one that is stylistically the most daring, the one that proposes a balanced reading of temporal layers and the one that inserts itself best—as much for its aesthetics as for its content—in a specific political context: the agony of Franco's dictatorship, the recuperation of lost memory, and the creation of a horizon of expectations from which a certain utopia emerges.

As Nancy Berthier indicates, it is apparent that, beginning with *La caza*, producer Elías Querejeta and director Carlos Saura put into practice a strategy to place their films within the international market. The basic question was how to evade the censor's mutilation of the film, and the solution they came up with was a model of writing based on ellipsis and allusions. They sought the support of an international public so as to broaden the scope of their message. This strategy played upon the interest of the Franco regime in creating an international artistic showcase as an alibi and a shield against the charge of obscurantism (Berthier 16). This series of strategies had clear stylistic consequences. In his first feature film, *Los golfos* (*The Delinquents*, 1959), Saura pushed to the limit a certain idea of realism based on the direct capture of reality and the refusal of overarching sociological explanations. Even so, this realistic model never earned a prestigious status, since at that point the European *cinéma d'auteur* was turning away from post-neorealist reflection to symbolism.

Saura and Querejeta began to construct a formal discourse based on the displacement from the social realm to interior worlds. This displacement would permit them to exorcise the ghosts that marked the identity crisis of the subject within the context of Franco's dictatorship.

Saura decided to play with the stylistic traits that defined the *cinéma d'auteur* of that period, notably spacio-temporal transgressions, narrative discontinuities, plays on cultural referents, baroque scene-setting through mirroring constructions, or uses of the symbolic allowing for symptomatic meanings. All of this forced the viewer to participate in an interpretive hermeneutics. From the curious mix of intellectual intuition and endless possibility, the model elaborated by Querejeta, of which Saura became the foremost advocate, fits perfectly within what David Bordwell, in his study on the aesthetic forms of cinema, has defined as the transition from a cinema based on sober staging to a cinema of fragmentation, ambiguity, distancing, and aesthetic effects (Bordwell, *On the History* 87). This second type of cinema, which strived to repeat the ruptures of literary modernity, is best represented by the father figures of Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, and Luis Buñuel. Such stylistic ruptures demonstrated what Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier defined as the liberation of a subjective writing capable of standing for the represented content and through which the decisions of editing could generate a particular dynamic of meaning (Ropars-Wuilleumier 12). Saura took the Querejeta model beyond the stereotypical Spanish usage of metaphorical film, placing it fully within a symbolist style that attempted to capture a multilayered reality (Zunzunegui, *Los fèlices* 82). That symbolist style perfectly connected with the principles of the *cinéma d'auteur*: the question was not how to find the best forms to represent reality, but rather how to show the crisis of subjectivity through a symbolic construction of the visible (Quintana 207).

The triumph of *La prima Angélica* at the 1974 Cannes Film Festival—where it earned the Special Jury Prize—served to situate that film at the epicenter of *cinéma d'auteur*. Various historians and critics were quick to point out similarities and parallels with the great masters of European cinema; in this way they certified the modernity of Saura's work. Román Gubern believed that Saura's treatment of time and the slippages of memory went significantly further than Alain Resnais's films, which *La prima Angélica* seemed to invoke (*Carlos Saura* 33). Marcel Oms, for his part, approached the film through *Wild Strawberries* (1957), in which the character of an old professor—Vilgot Sjöstrom—takes a journey through the passage of his life and becomes a privileged spectator of the events. Oms believed that the essential difference with Luis's character in *La prima Angélica*, played by José Luis López Vázquez, resides in the fact that Bergman does not bring about a return to infancy (Gubern, *Carlos Saura* 88). A parallel may also be drawn between the impact of Theo Angelopoulos's *The Traveling Players* (1975) within Greek society during the final years of the Colonels' dictatorship and the impact of *La prima*

Angélica in the final years of Franco's dictatorship. The play of citations ended with the figure of Luis Buñuel, of whom many European critics considered Saura to be the purported heir. It is relatively easy to establish a relationship between the spectral image of the tortured monk that appears in Luis's dreams and the Buñuelian deliriums of the ghosts of Black Spain.

The multiple stylistic parallelisms have to do with the fact that *La prima Angélica* fully inscribes itself in a cultural context marked by the search for a new relationship with space, time, and memory as a way of coming to terms with the contradictions of collective history. All of the stylistic exercises flow together into a reflection on the destruction of the bases of identity. Saura develops his formal inquiries with more inspiration that in his previous films, and this felicity raises *La prima Angélica* to a level of modernity that Spanish cinema was unable to make its own. This was a modernity that never was able to mature, perhaps, because it was too artificial. Spanish cinema did not have a strong theoretical connection with modern cinematic thought, and the weak attempts in this direction—New Spanish Cinema or the Barcelona School—did not take root in the environment of false social and moral modernization.

In the moment of rethinking the historical context, it is important to keep in mind that *La prima Angélica* was produced in the midst of the full decomposition of Francoism and in the face of reactionary forces that were not only vigilant but also aggressive (Losilla 718). This fact explains why Saura and his scriptwriter Rafael Azcona—master of black humor and screenwriter for many of Luis García Berlanga's finest pictures, including *El verdugo* (*Not On Your Life*, 1963)—had to produce three versions of the script; the first two drafts were not approved by the censors. The film's premiere was surrounded by controversy. The most reactionary critics spoke of the existence of an international conspiracy, and the extreme right exploded a bomb in the lobby of the Balmes movie house in Barcelona, the location where the film had premiered in July of 1974 (Galán 43). The end result of the polemic was the conversion of *La prima Angélica* into both the greatest success of late-Francoist Spanish cinema and the film that best appeared to articulate a new way of speaking about aspects of Spanish life that had been erased from the official memory (Monterde, *Veinte años* 112). As Marvin D'Lugo has shown, after Jaime Camino's *España otra vez* (*Spain Again*, 1968) centered on an exile and former International Brigade member's return to Barcelona, *La prima Angélica* was the first film with a protagonist from a Republican family (D'Lugo, *Carlos Saura* 116). Throughout the film, the character of Luis probes the heart of a Fascist family with the dual intention of capturing the ghosts of that world and liberating himself from them.

The contextualization of *La prima Angélica* should not stop with film; to understand its narrative structure it is useful to establish its possible links with a series of transformations that, at the beginning of the 1970s, were affecting literature. These transformations were changing characters' perspectives within a storytelling framework that no longer was based in linearity, but rather in the sediment of various layers of memory. The theme of the Spanish Civil War is the epicenter of the film because, as Eduado Haro Tecglen recalls, the war was for the future Spanish artists who were children during the fighting and matured under Fascism a kind of past that was alive in the present; Haro Tecglen amplifies this to the point of affirming: "all contemporary Spanish reality is impregnated with the Civil War" (Haro Tecglen 12). For the intellectuals of the 1960s, the war marked the debut of a reign of manipulation, of a sleight of the real. In the same way that Saura moved from the direct realism of *Los golfos* to the symbolic world of *La prima Angélica*, some literature of the period followed a similar path, using parable to search for another logic of the real. To understand the narrative elements of *La prima Angélica* it is useful to remember that Juan Goytisolo wrote *La reivindicación del Conde Don Julián* (*Count Julian*) in 1971 and that Juan Marsé's *Si te dicen que caí* (*The Fallen*) was published in 1973, the same year that Saura filmed his movie (Hernández Ruiz and Pérez Rubio 98). As Jean Tena points out, there is a certain agreement among the narrative elements of these novels. The past of the war is relived in the present through the reactivation of a memory that establishes a series of rhymes without any solution of continuity (Tena, "Carlos Saura" 128).

From the start, *La prima Angélica* takes us back to the trauma of the Civil War through a protagonist who is openly autobiographic. Carlos Saura, as a child of the war, lived the bombing raids and had to grow up in a dictatorship that brought about a sort of castration of the cultural roots and the identities of an entire generation of artistic creators. It is no coincidence that the opening images, slow and diffuse, presented as a prologue, are those of the bombing of a school as seen from the interior. These images will be repeated later on in the film; they have the character of an originary image that keeps returning because it speaks to the existence of a trauma. They are images of the diffuse projection of individual memory that should acquire a corporeal weight upon transiting from the prologue to the heart of the fiction. Saura departs from his subjectivity in order to confront it with the collective memory, through which the process of identification is worked out. Luis, the protagonist, emerges from these originary images to return to the past, engaging the spectator in a temporal exploration by means of the oscillation of memory. Luis is not an individual being, but rather

the image of a generation, because "we who identify with Luis are, in the first place, those who lost the Civil War" (Haro Tecglen 13). These are the members of a generation of losers who were made, like Luis, into the antiheroes of the Spanish official story. The losers had to coexist with the generation of winners who turned the passage of time into a process of the destruction of culture. The losers felt that their world was out of place and lacking a center due to the becoming of history, a becoming that forced them to live anew a terrible past. How could one revise that past using a medium of expression like that of cinema, which is capable of sculpting time and space?

La prima Angélica achieves this goal through a poetics constructed around the figure of the split personality. Luis returns to the place where he lived the Civil War during his childhood—Segovia—with the hope of burying the ashes of his deceased mother. Luis spent the war in Segovia, with the Francoists, without being able to visit his parents, who were in the Republican zone of Barcelona. Luis' memories of his past are accessed from the viewpoint of an adult Luis dressed as the child he was. The same stylistic confusion with time can be found in Saura's *El jardín de las delicias* (*The Garden of Delights*, 1970), in which, at one moment in the story, the character Antonio Caro—José Luis López Vázquez—has a daydream in which he sees his aunt taking care of him as a child, but he maintains his appearance of a mature man. Saura affirms that this fixation with the body of his characters as a trace of the present that interrupts the past emerged when, while coauthoring the script for *La prima Angélica* with Rafael Azcona, he realized that, when exploring his own infancy, he was incapable of writing dialogues that would replicate the way he spoke as a child, since he could only see the world from the point of view of his own age. Because of this, he thought of his childhood "as if it were an intrusion that I, from my current age, would reenter in the world of my infancy. I was not that removed from it because it was my own" (Talvat 119). The revision of the past is brought about through a stylistic exercise that adapts itself to the discursive forms of a period in which film and literature were reconfiguring the notions of the work and the author. The particular status of *La prima Angélica* in Saura's oeuvre is based on the fact that, unlike his other films that speak about the individual's fixation through the description of the rituals of a Francoist family, in this case Saura decides to take the subject back to the past, utilizing the description of the paradoxes of memory as the axis for the temporal displacement (D'Lugo, *Carlos Saura* 119). Luis is someone who lived the war and the postwar through the split between his stepfamily of Francoist victors and his real family of Republican losers. The slippages caused by the paradoxes of memory, with its contradictions and

uncertainties, situate *La prima Angélica* on privileged ground, the fruit of tensions between a particular sensibility and the stylistic strategies adopted from the *cinéma d'auteur* of the period.

The "Crystal Image"

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of time and its projection in memory became one of the key questions of critical study and reflection. This trend was present in philosophies that questioned the grand-narrative structure of thinking and the illusion of realism propagated by the nineteenth-century novel. In *Matière et mémoire*, the philosopher Henri Bergson formulated a thesis of time and of the relationships that we can establish with it from our own present. Among other ideas, Bergson proposed that the past coexists with the present. The past is conserved in memory as the past, but it is not stored in chronological form: time splits in each instant into the present and the past, a present that passes and a past that remains (Bergson 161–314). Time forces us to know the present and allows us to know the past. Gaëtan Picon, in his reading of Proust, believes that the *je* of Proustian narration does not correspond to the history of Marcel Proust, but rather to his disordered experience, the sum of his encounters with the world. Time appears as something external. Life is past, experience is something finished, but words have a future, and the work can build upon a retrospective movement based in an attitude of contemplation and resurrection of the past, beginning from the idea that the flows of life only advance from the ebb (Picon, *Lecture de Proust* 49–51).

The work of Bergson and Proust has greatly informed the construction of the concept of modernity in cinematographic theory. In an essay on cinema and modernity, Mary Ann Doane reminds us that the technologies of reproduction that appeared at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries—contemporary with Bergson and Proust—were crucial in the conceptualization of time and its representation (Doane, *The Emergence* 4). In parallel fashion, Leo Charney uses the term "drift" to explain how modern cinematography could reformulate itself through "the activity that battled empty presence by appropriating it, maneuvering within and around it" (Charney, *Empty* 9). Proust interrogated his own consciousness so as to fill the void of the present and thus create a way of representing time. In modern cinema, the layers of the visible world, captured as empty instants from the present, serve to investigate this invisible realm called the past. Bergson's thought is the starting point for Gilles Deleuze's taxonomy of cinematic forms, which

he divides into the movement-image, considered as that vectorized image that perceives a conflict and puts itself into movement to resolve it, and the time-image, arising in post-World War II film and considered an image that perceives the conflict but locates that conflict in its interior. This image corresponds to a cinema of seeing, not a cinema of action ("a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent" [Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* 2), the first being an image of cinema in which time is converted into the essential matter that determines the narrative structure of the work through games of superimposition or temporal reflections.

Carlos Saura's films do not appear in Deleuze's taxonomy of the time-image. The Spanish filmmaker par excellence of his time does not figure in the pantheon of the great artists of modernity. However, it is evident that *La prima Angélica* could fit perfectly among the works by the group of filmmakers that Deleuze defines as working with points of the present and layers of the past—the same category of works in which he includes, for example, the films of Alain Resnais, especially works like *Muriel* (1963) and *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968). Deleuze believes that, in this model of cinema, "the present begins to float, struck with uncertainty, dispersed in the characters' comings and goings or already absorbed by the past" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 116). Saura uses an uncertain present, that of late Francoism, as his starting point, and his images emerge from a time in which the weightless load of subjective isolation still persisted. During the dictatorship, a series of closed spaces had emerged that the cinema converts into its preferred spaces of representation. Among these we can consider the "familiar" milieu that Saura analyzes in previous works such as *El jardín de las delicias* and *Ana y los lobos* (*Anna and the Wolves*, 1972). This is a space that has remained closed in its frustrations, vices, and a self-satisfied form of thinking of time as an eternal lethargic present. Compared to *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), for example, there is no contrast of memories between the lived—the Japanese man who suffered the trauma—and the visited—the young French girl who has seen the Museum. In Saura's film, individual memory does not accede to the past through flashbacks, nor through the revelation of hidden temporality, but rather through a process of splitting, which turns the image of the present into the image of the past as Luis's adult body enters the space of Luis the child. In Saura's film, the two times function without alternations, because time within Franco's dictatorship did not have alternations or modifications. It is a time that, as an eternal present, has destroyed the moral, cultural, sexual, political, and religious identity of an entire generation.

Saura's use of the split character in his work can connect with another one of the divisions in Deleuze's time-image: the idea of the crystal

image. Deleuze defines the crystal image from the premise that actual time is a changing present that constantly modifies itself when a new present replaces it. This instability of the present has its consequences in the realm of the image in that it constantly establishes a tension between the present—the actual image—and its contemporary past—the virtual image. Time, therefore, when it transforms itself into an image, is something that "splits itself into present and past, present that passes and past that is preserved" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 82). This mirroring idea of time based in splitting departs from the idea that film establishes an opposition between the objective and the subjective. The present captured by cinema presents itself as objective, but within this objective world it inscribes the subjective world of the character, displaced through memory toward the past. Given the process of splitting utilized in the film, *La prima Angélica* could inscribe itself within the logic of the crystal image. However, there is an important nuance that one must keep in mind. Saura does not film the present as reality, but rather as symbolic space.

In the film's present the characters travel through spaces that partake of the essentialism of symbols. The barren plain, populated by the bunkers in the distance, is a space of initiation that still bears the traces of war. The family house is a space of reclusion whose stench of mothballs reflects the oppressiveness of the closed world. The school is the place of childhood nightmares, embodied by the priests and the religious rituals that mark their presence. Meanwhile the roof, thought of as a hiding spot, transforms into the space of the instinctive and the transgressive. It is on the roof that, in the past, Luis kissed Angélica, and in the present it is the place where he resuscitates a previously repressed desire. Saura establishes, through a markedly metonymic game, a vision of space as a settling of the past, as the realm in which the secret traces of the collective drama remain waiting for the story to draw them to the surface. With this movement between past and present, Saura establishes a tension between a geology of history and an endoscopy of behavior (Zunzunegui, *Los felices* 80). The endoscopy portrays the relationship that the different characters maintain with the past from within their closed world of the eternal present.

As mentioned above, Saura's use of a split character to bring about the displacement of the past contains some points of contact with Deleuze's crystal image. Luis, the key subject in the process of splitting, travels toward infancy without modifying his physical aspect, as if he were an incarnation of memory in transit. The spectator never sees the child that Luis was during the war, since the adult body dominates, although at a certain moment it takes on childish traits, perhaps to facilitate the spectator's access to a more temporal dimension.

In his wide-ranging treatise on memory, Paul Ricoeur demonstrates that the critical moment in the entire phenomenology of memory resides in the act of asking oneself if a memory can become a kind of image, and then in discovering what image may emerge from this memory. Ricoeur recognizes, inspired by Bergson's *Matière et mémoire*, that in the act of memory, the pure memory passes to the image memory (Ricoeur 53–60). In *La prima Angélica*, Luis's memory journey appears to establish a path from memories as diffuse acts to memories as preestablished images. At the base of this path lies the importance that different acts or ways of seeing the world gain within the general fabric of the film (D'Lugo, *Carlos Saura* 122). Luis transforms his gaze so as to contemplate the past; upon doing this, he recognizes how the act of vision contains something dangerous within itself, since it ends up reflecting the barriers that pertain to the constitution of identity. In the midst of this process, the nostalgia for lost infancy becomes the testimony of the immaturity of the adult, due, above all, to his becoming conscious of the wounds and frustrations of a particular historical moment.

As Fernando Lara indicated, Luis's search became the psychoanalysis of a generation, given that the film is structured as a search for the moment in which a definite memory could emerge in consciousness (Lara 152). The film takes the foggy nature of memory as its starting point, as demonstrated by the progression of the first scene of the film. The first image is that of Luis as he travels in a Seat 124 along a stretch of highway. The character stops at the side of the road, gets out of his car, and observes the vast countryside illuminated by the light of the setting sun. One can glimpse a city in the distance: Segovia. Silence floods the scene, but, bit by bit, it is populated by noises, from the crowing of a raven to the cowbells of an invisible herd. The off-screen sound appears to certify the persistence of a time perceived in the present; Saura does not delay in transforming this sound into a key element in the forging of the temporal transition. Next, a 1930s Ford pulls up near Luis, without braking; in the interior are his father and mother, who both get out of the car. Through the off-screen sound and the figurative play between the two cars, Saura establishes the temporal transition. Luis has not changed in dress or appearance; he maintains his unaltered image throughout the scene, which unfolds in the interplay between the past and the present, between the actual and the virtual, following Deleuze's logic of the crystal image. In this scene, as in the next where Luis is not able to recognize the signs of his past, there is a diffuse vision. This idea of the past as something blurred emerges throughout the entire first part of the film, until the moment in which Luis returns to the countryside of the opening scene and no longer sees the projected

images of others, but rather he sees himself as part of that other world that was his childhood.

To give shape to the past and to reconcile the blurry and diffuse layers of memory, Saura establishes a relationship between objects and memories, between the real world and the oneiric dimension of the nightmares of the past. This relationship is founded in the reminiscence expressed through the objects, odors, and gestures that transport the character to the past and help him configure that diffuse image. Upon arriving at his aunt Pilar's house, Luis enters the room where he had slept during the Civil War. The smell of camphor and the decorations on the shelf transport him to the past. The objects in the attic also carry part of his history, and the desks at his school have not changed either. The decision to show the interior of the Francoist family's house as a bunker highlights Saura's masterful directorial skills. This entire process appears to refer to a trauma in which things become concrete and the dark side of childhood emerges. Before the trauma forcefully reveals itself, nightmares appear; these nightmares acquire a clear imaginative dimension through the image of the assassination of the father, the projections of the film *The Eyes of London*, whose essential symbolic image is one of inquisitive eyes, and that other image, with Buñuelian overtones, of the deceased nun. The trauma is revealed in the final moments when Luis becomes aware of the fact that he cannot revive his love for Angélica—a childhood love, sealed in a yellowed paper that certifies its reality in 1938—because Angélica is married to Anselmo and, as shown in the final moments, she feels alone in her home and a prisoner of her husband. Saura reveals the origin of this trauma when he shows the scene of young Luis and Angélica running away through the war-torn landscape. Both children are recognized by Francoist soldiers and brought to the house of their uncle Anselmo who, assuming the role of the castrating paternal figure, gives Luis a fierce beating.

In the course of *La prima Angélica*, Luis, although he is the main focus of the story, is not the only character who participates in the splitting process; this splitting finds its counterpoint in the temporal games brought about in the characters of Anselmo and Angélica. During the years of the war, Anselmo was Luis's surrogate father and the disciplinary force in his life, to the point of transforming himself into a repressive figure, a clear castrator. Saura carries out a curious displacement by using the same actor—Fernando—to portray the character of Anselmo—Angélica's husband—and placing him into the paradigm established by the wolves in his previous film *Anna and the Wolves*, into which he inserted the great specters of Francoism—the army, the Church, and sexual repression. Anselmo repressed Luis in his childhood and now he represses his

wife Angélica, converting her into the prisoner of specters of a desire that cannot be materialized.

The splitting is also brought about through the character of the young Angélica, played by María Clara Fernández. Luis had his first tentative sexual experiences with his child cousin. In the present, this girl is a woman—Lina Canalejas, who also plays the role of Angélica's mother in 1938—but the childlike aspect of the girl that Luis loved is maintained in the image of the other Angélica—the daughter of Anselmo and Angélica—who lives in aunt Pilar's decrepit mansion. This game of mirrors between the girl who was and the woman who cannot reach her fullness as a woman within a patriarchal society is finally made concrete in the last image of the film. The mother and the daughter of 1938 are reflected—once again the Deleuzian concept of the crystal image—in the daughter and the mother of 1973. Both are transformed into one and the same person, the same as Luis the child and Luis the adult. The synthetic image ultimately announces that, at heart, the overarching problem that Saura has been investigating, as Marcel Oms highlights, is the observation of "the mental structures engendered by the survival of a parasitic and tenacious past" (Oms, "Une approche" 13).

Conclusion: Memory Hidden Today

Luis's anxiety about memory becomes the extrapolation of a phenomenon key to the understanding of late Francoism. This was a period in which a collective desire to remember and to resurrect the ghosts hidden by Francoism emerged among the young, prompted by the hopes that a still uncertain future inspired in them. It was necessary to deconstruct the official history and to make clear its lies. The principal objective of this process was the construction of an alternative historical narrative in which the losers finally find justice and rescue the victims from an oblivion produced by the ghosts of the dictatorship. When contemplating *La prima Angélica* from our own present, more than thirty years after its original production, Luis's character gains symbolic force as the first fictional character that recovers the power of memory as an act of resurrection of the hidden and of justice to that which is silenced.

The figure of Luis has gained a special force with the passing of time, above all at a moment in which the theme of historical memory has emerged in Spain. Today the debate over memory is present in Spanish fiction and cinematographic documentaries, and it is usually accompanied by a critical revision of the pact of silence perpetrated by the transition to democracy. As Vincente Sánchez-Biosca indicates, the

problem does not reside in the recuperation of precise facts, or in the importance of historical research that has investigated all of the possible details of Francoism, but rather in observing how Francoism created a collective image of an age during which its propaganda was the only form of knowledge available. Today it is only possible to break up that propaganda through the creation of other imaginaries (Sánchez-Biosca, "Políticas de la memoria" 41). In proposing an identification with the viewpoint of a Republican child, *La prima Angélica* opened a road toward the unmaking of the Francoist imaginary, in a way similar to the significant fictions of late Francoism and the transition period, films like Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*, 1973) and several historical documentaries, from Basilio Martín Patino's *Caudillo* (1974) to Jaime Camino's *La vieja memoria* (*The Old Memory*, 1977). This was a fruitful road that over time has proven longer and more difficult than initially imagined.

6

Ambiguous Disenchantment in *El corazón del bosque* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1979)

Irení Depetris-Chauvin

The Santanderian filmmaker Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón (1942–) has produced one of the most unique bodies of work in contemporary Spanish cinema. Over a period of thirty years he directed thirteen films, created a television adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (2002), and made important contributions as a scriptwriter. Although most recognized by the public for recent films, such as *Cosas que dejé en La Habana* (1997), it was with his films shot in the late 1970s and early 1980s that he conceived his original aesthetic. Critics have both celebrated and disapproved of *Habla, mudita* (1973), *Camada negra* (1977), *Sonámbulos* (1978), *El corazón del bosque* (1979), *Maravillas* (1981), and *Feroz* (1983) for their lyric, enigmatic, or even unintelligible narratives. As other directors during the 1970s Spanish Transition to democracy, Gutiérrez Aragón has dealt with Spanish reality by creating metaphorical stories and achieved this through an approach that stresses the interweaving of testimony with fable.[1]

Leaving aside his specific aesthetic resolution, it is almost impossible to consider Gutiérrez Aragón's work outside the framework of the political realities of the Transition. A member of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) from 1962 until 1975, with *Camada negra* (1977), *Sonámbulos* (1978), and *El corazón del bosque* (1979), Gutiérrez Aragón produced a

Fig. 6. Angela Molina and Víctor Valverde as Amparo and Suso in *El corazón del bosque*. Courtesy of Arándano S.A.

remarkably heterodox political trilogy.[2] Of the three films, the last one has most consistently been identified as reaching a sort of aesthetic and political balance. Through a narrative that is extremely poetic and difficult to digest, Gutiérrez Aragón directly addresses the intricate problem of the guerrilla's resistance to Franco and, in doing so, he provides perhaps the most vivid testimony of the ideology of disenchantment.

In a suggestive reading of *El corazón del bosque,* John Hopewell rightly notes that the film concerns itself less with a debate about Spain's historical past than with the creation of personal, popular, and political myths. His analysis shows how the incidents of the tale, the status of the individual characters and their symbolic relations, the framing and lighting style of Gutiérrez Aragón's film invoke a mythical universe persistently threatened by history.[3] Undoubtedly, Hopewell's clearing path through *El corazón del bosque*'s intersection of myth and history serves as a reminder of the complex polysemy of Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón's narrative. In a sense, the logics of both myth and history are represented in the film; however, instead of conceiving them clearly as opposites, the world of *El corazón del bosque* evokes a fascinating ambiguity. In this essay, I would like to reconsider that ambiguity, illustrating how the logics of myth and of history are subverted by Gutiérrez Aragón. As an example, I will take into account both the cinematic techniques used to portray the main

characters of the film and the role of the folkloric tale that, mediating between the logics of myth and history, allows Gutiérrez Aragón to display original conceptions about knowledge and political commitment.

At the most basic level, *El corazón del bosque* draws from real historical events. The narrative tells about the *Maquis*, the Republican soldiers who continued to resist in the woods of the northern part of Spain in the years following the Spanish Civil War but, instead of focusing on that figure, the film centers on the search that Juan (Norman Brisky), a member of the Communist Party, undertakes for the former leader of the *Maquis*, El Andarín (Luis Politti), who, alone and sick, refuses to give in to Franco's victory. *El corazón del bosque*'s opening title explicitly declares that the narration is "based on various events and people who existed in the same woods where the film was shot," but from these realistic events Gutiérrez Aragón outlines an unusual reflection on the *Maquis* that he presents as part of a perverted myth or fairy tale.

The portrayal of El Andarín is essential to the film's critical evocation of the myth. With the exception of the final scene, when he faces Juan outside the forest, there are no shots that show El Andarín as a recognizable person. On the contrary, he is a confusing image, physically indistinguishable through the fog and darkness of the forest. This visual depiction stresses El Andarín's mythical category, a dimension that is also confirmed by the cottager's daughter when she tells Juan that everybody in the area refers to El Andarín simply as "He." But in *El corazón del bosque* the myth deteriorates. Although the cottager's daughter declares El Andarín's involvement in a universal "He," she also confides that the *maqui* suffers a terrible skin disease. Further on, Juan's sister, Amparo (Angela Molina), while giving some clues to help find El Andarín, adds that he is definitively lost. In this way, reinforcing the tension between El Andarín's heroic status and his human condition and illness, Gutiérrez Aragón illustrates how the myth not only is devastated by history, but it is also affected by a process of degeneration inherent to its own logic.

Besides the depiction of El Andarín as a disturbing father-king figure, the adoption and subversion of the structures of myth and fairy tale manifest themselves in the visual representation of the hero's castle. Far from being simply the place where the story occurs, the forest arises as the true protagonist of the film.[4] Teo Escamilla's cinematography of the Cantabrian woods portrays a natural environment where realistic references dissolve into the fog. Mainly shot in gray, blue, and green, the scenes of extreme darkness structure a setting where it becomes highly difficult to distinguish characters and events. The blurry optic accentuates while Juan enters into the forest seeking his comrade. Long shots of his insignificant figure melting into the blue mist of the woods intercalate with extreme

close-ups showing only Juan's disoriented gaze and suggest the stoicism of a character who does not own his destiny, because it subsumes into the logic of the forest. The green coats of the civil guards, the shots in the weeds, and the *Maquis* represent signs of a concrete historical conflict; however, the film's visual aesthetics indicate that Juan's conflict with El Andarín goes beyond the historical clash. The filmmaker visually intensifies the woods, the fog, the moisture, the mud, and the rain, although he uses different degrees of shadow to suggest a dimension of mystery that turns the physical forest into an imaginary place where most of what happens is merely insinuated.[5] Above all, in Gutiérrez Aragón's film, the forest symbolizes a chaotic place. As Íñigo Marzábal points out, it is at once a spatial labyrinth, a place without limits and definite contours, and a temporal labyrinth where present and past blur. There, chatting with Atilano, a ghostly figure whom we cannot discern as either dead or alive, Juan recalls his own memories of childhood that confusingly fuse with those of Atilano.

The disturbing images of the forest pin the viewer to guess their meaning. Perhaps more than in a conventional film, in *El corazón del bosque* the soundtrack becomes important in terms of understanding a space where elements of reality fit together with dream-like sensations. Already, with the opening credits' sequence, the forest is a sonorous presence, a primordial reality preceding what will take place there. Throughout the film, the chirping of the birds, the rushing of the water over the stones, the sounds of water drops falling on the ground or on the leaves of the trees, the noise of human steps on the vegetation precede the visual sequences, functioning as clues to the visually confusing images. Sound plays a significant role in the viewer's interpretation of images, and also in Juan's own decipherment of a forest that reveals itself as an opaque text. Even though Juan fails in his first attempt to find El Andarín, the sounds of nature lead him to discover his own rural roots.[6]

John Hopewell accurately observes that in *El corazón del bosque* the tension between history and myth reverberates in the uses of two different visual styles. The dark, misty images of the forest contrast with the clear, realistic images of the outside world, as in the shots of Suso and Amparo's wedding lunch. Nevertheless, the connections of these two temporal logics with the culture/nature and knowledge/ignorance oppositions appear more ambiguously in the film. The play of light and shadow, dominant in the forest, can be read as a descent to the unconscious; but neither is the seeker/viewer lost in the darkness of ignorance at all times, nor does the film univocally associate light and history as sources of knowledge. When Juan enters the forest, the girl's song—and not his knowledge of history—guides him in the search for El Andarín.

Through the use of folklore as mediator, the film calls into question the oppositions between the pairs myth/history and ignorance/knowledge. The remarkably obscure narrative of Gutiérrez Aragón's film seems to communicate both the necessity and the impossibility of myth. Simultaneously, *El corazón del bosque* reflects more on the paradox than on the impossibility of knowledge. By 1952, the lights of the Civil Guard patrolling the roads or searching the *maquis* in the forest seem to suggest that history has begun to control myth. However, when ten years later El Andarín attacks the electricity supply depot and reestablishes darkness in the region, this act implies another kind of knowledge, as one civil guard suggests when he affirms that "El Andarín knows everything": the singing of birds, the smells, the edible fruits, the local songs. Juan's successful search for El Andarín also presumes the existence of popular forms of knowledge. Familiarity with the sounds of nature allows Juan to explore the forest. Defeated, he boards a bus to leave the village, but the image of himself as a child and the shoes that Amparo gave him make him recommence the search for El Andarín. Finally, the sound of Amparo's voice and the soft voice of a young girl singing a popular song send Juan on his quest. The folk song offers a coded message that helps Juan to find his way in the darkness of the unconscious. The repetition of the song's riddle allows him to decipher the enigmatic signs of the forest and provides him with clues about the hiding place of "El."[7]

The girl's song that orientates Juan through the forest also organizes as a childlike fable the elliptical narrative of the film. As in previous Gutiérrez Aragón's films, *El corazón del bosque*'s interweaving of the folk or fairy tale with the logics of myth and history supports Gutiérrez Aragón's reflection on politics. To some extent, *El corazón del bosque* is a subverted folk tale. Joseph Campbell (1973) argues that many folk tales consist of a "hero's journey" characterized by the hero's antagonism toward paternal figures. These heroes go on long voyages, during which they are set difficult tasks and suffer from prohibitions, while food and other necessities are magically provided. At a broad psychological level, these stories are a form of "family romance," where the hero is separated from his family but on his return his achievements—the triumph over the father—are recognized by his relatives.

El corazón del bosque conforms to several of the elements of this pattern but there are some important things that Gutiérrez Aragón suppressed or subverted. In the first place, even though the film shows Juan in search of a mythical father figure, it also makes clear that, unlike the hero of the myth, Juan represents treason. In this way, Gutiérrez Aragón places the antihero in the center of the story and adopts the point of view of the traitor to call the attention to his ego, being torn between

his inscription in the traditional life and his ideological commitments. Criticizing the PCE apparatus that kills its own comrades and demystifying the *Maquis* as heroes out of place, *El corazón del bosque* unfolds a contradictory vision of the anti-Francoist resistance that functions also as a more general reflection on the possibilities of political resistance during the Transition.[8] The hero's return and his recognition by the family is another aspect altered by the film. Instead of achieving this recognition, Juan is betrayed by Amparo and Suso, who tip off the civil guards. Thus, the logic of treason spreads to family, reinforcing Gutiérrez Aragón's pessimistic view on the possibility of discriminating between heroes and traitors.

Discussing the sociopolitical connections between folktale and myth, Jack Zipes (1994) affirms that most popular tales intend to endow communal experiences with meaning and designate ways for creating concrete utopias. Even though *El corazón del bosque* uses the structure of a folktale, the film subverts both its emancipatory potential and its emphasis on communal harmony. In a study of traditional popular cultures, E. P. Thompson considers the mutual reinforcement between specific events of political resistance and the discourses of popular folklore. Showing the changing relations of the *Maquis* with the people, the film suggests the limits of that mutual reinforcement. In one of the first scenes, which refers to 1942, El Andarín appears at the village's fair dancing with the women, and one subtitle states that "he belongs to a hopeful fight," suggesting that the people conceive the political dimension of that popular event. Ten years later, another subtitle affirms that he is a residue that should be eliminated. Represented by Suso and Amparo, the people consider that the *Maquis'* reason for fighting no longer obtains and they betray him.

The necessity and failure of myth underlie the pessimistic view of Gutiérrez Aragón on Spain's Transition to democracy. In *El corazón del bosque*, the myth is invoked only to be deconstructed. As a place that keeps a secret, a truth uncorrupted by History, the forest functions as a chaotic and inhospitable realm that putrefies the bodies of those who seek refuge in it.[9] Along with El Andarín's physical degeneration, *El corazón del bosque* exemplifies the decadence of the mythical universe through the degenerative effect of incest in the family, as well as the social and political degeneration brought about by people's attitudes of collaboration and treason.

In opposition to the linearity of history, myth evidences the logic of circularity and reiteration (Resina, *Mythopoesis* 252). *El corazón del bosque*'s closing shot is impressive, as the camera focuses on an eagle that circles around the spot where El Andarín's body lies, reinforcing a sense of mythical destiny. While El Andarín's disfiguration begins to reproduce

itself in Juan, his death at the hands of the latter not only allows the *Maquis* to become definitively a myth, but also implies Juan's replacement of this father figure. This circular path transports the story to a moment outside of time or history, but the final point of this cycle signals a regression. Like El Andarín, Juan experiences a crisis and transformation, but in the end he does not achieve a higher status; he reenters instead into the quotidian sphere where politics no longer dominates.

In an interview, Gutiérrez Aragón pointed out that treason and knowledge were the central topics of his films. Unlike the PCE apparatus' Marxist teleology, in *El corazón del bosque* neither history nor knowledge implies liberation. In the film both myth and history are in crisis; history, far from being a narrative of progress, follows a degenerative pattern. With the recurrent use of a short musical phrase from *Solamente una vez*—the romantic song played by Suso at the country fair—the film nostalgically reinforces Gutiérrez Aragón's disenchantment, showing the unresolved paradoxes of knowledge and political commitment. The leitmotiv song states that "just once in my life I surrendered my soul, only once in my life hope shone." In the disillusioned world of *El corazón del bosque* hope has only a slight and fading presence, and, tragically, treason turns out to be the motor of knowledge and history.

Notes

1. Carlos Heredero affirmed that although Gutiérrez Aragón articulates a representational mode where reality is portrayed as hyperbolic, fantastic, or oneiric, the persistent use of fairy-tale structures allows him to display and measure all these irrational elements (13).

2. *Camada negra* (1977), the first film of the trilogy, situates itself between the testimony and the initiation fairy tale. The story follows Tatin, a fifteen-year-old Fascist aspirant, who swears to adhere to his family's code and comply with the three conditions—revenge, secret, and sacrifice—that the mythological protagonist must meet to attain heroic status. The following year, Gutiérrez Aragón filmed *Sonámbulos.* Also on the border between reality and fable, *Sonámbulos* is a fairy tale about Ana, a Communist militant suffering from cancer who betrays her mother—a sort of occlusive queen—in order to cheat death.

3. According to Hopewell, the central tension of *El corazón del bosque* surrounds the contradiction between myth and history: "Myth, which orders people's lives, adds weight, value to the chaos; history withers attachments, creates and destroys myth" ("*El corazón del bosque*" 172).

4. The forest is a recurrent setting in Gutiérrez Aragón's cinematography. In his debut film, *Habla, mudita* (1973), he carried the camera to the landscape of the Cantabrian woods. *Hansel y Gretel* (1969), a film he shot as a student, José Luis Borau's

Furtivos (1975), which he co-scripted, and *Feroz* (1983**)** all evoke this preoccupation with country life along with Gutiérrez Aragón's characteristic interest in food.

5. El Andarín and the civil guards appear to Juan as ethereal; their steps, shouts, and distant shots are the only clues of them offered by the forest.

6. Exploring the forest, Juan realizes that he can still intone the melody of an ancient local song or the singing of some birds.

7. In his debut film, *Habla, mudita* (1973), Gutiérrez Aragón began his reflection on the possibilities of knowledge. Through the story of a book publisher obsessed with trying to teach a young, deaf-mute shepherdess to speak, Gutiérrez Aragón reflects on the relations between culture and primitivism and on the function of language in communication. But this is not a happy story, and the pessimistic ending reveals the impossibility of learning. *Sonámbulos* (1978), the second film of Gutiérrez Aragón's political trilogy, is also a reflection on the paradoxes of knowledge—its necessity and its limits—and on the tension between political commitment and personal ethics. *Maravillas* (1980), the story of a sixteen-year-old girl's encounters with adult life, implies also a reflection on the unresolved paradox of knowledge.

8. It is possible to think about a projection of Gutiérrez Aragón's own dilemma prior to abandoning the PCE.

9. In a hypothetical dialogue with Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1902), Íñigo Marzábal (2001) points out that *El corazón del bosque* is a narrative about knowledge, since it represents the trip of a hero in search of a father figure that holds a secret; however, the physical trip is an interior journey that implies the threat of insanity and death. With a Freudian approach, Teresa Vilarós (1998) also recognizes that the entrance into the woods implies a process of unveiling that turns out to be destructive and degenerative. For her the forest is the place of the uncanny where political losses are translated into and refer to psychological ones.

7

Los paraísos perdidos
Cinema of Return and Repetition
(Basilio Martín Patino, 1985)

TATJANA PAVLOVIĆ

FORTUNATE THE MAN WHOSE NATIVE COUNTRY FLOURISHES TO REJOICE AND STRENGTHEN HIS HEART! FOR ME, IT IS AS IF I WERE CAST INTO A SWAMP, AS IF THE COFFIN LID WERE BEING NAILED SHUT OVER ME, IF ANYONE REMINDS ME OF MINE . . . .

—Hyperion to Bellarmin (*Hyperion*, 1st letter)

Suspended between joy and sorrow for a man's return to his native country, Hölderlin's *Hyperion* is one of the main intertextual supports of Basilio Martín Patino's *Los paraísos perdidos* (*The Lost Paradise*, 1985). Furthermore, one of *Hyperion's* central premises, a problematic relation to one's native soil, marks Martín Patino's entire opus. Both *Hyperion* and *Los paraísos perdidos* unfold through the motif of return and estrangement. In both texts return and its impossibility are above all an encounter with memory and history, obsessive themes that haunt Martín Patino's films and his tumultuous relationship with Spain.

In *Los paraísos perdidos* the theme of return is embodied in the protagonist, Ella/She (played by Charo López), a daughter of exiled Republican intellectuals/artists, who returns to her parents' native country, her dying mother, and her dead father's archives.[1] The formal and

Fig. 7. Three old women. Courtesy of La Linterna Mágica.

thematic complexity of *Los paraísos perdidos* stems from the juxtaposition of three historical periods: Civil War and Exile, the Franco dictatorship, and the Socialist present (1980s) to which Ella returns.

Besides the protagonist, a complex set of characters from her past participates in the "return," remembering, *disremembering*, and a symbolic settling of accounts: Miguel (an estranged intellectual involved in politics and the publishing industry), Benito (a disillusioned anti-Francoist), Lorenzo (a conformist Rector of the University) and an unnamed amnesic Socialist politician.[2] Intricate interconnections between Ella and these characters, prototypes of the Transition period, create a complex and (dis)continuous relation to the historical memory and indebtedness to the past. She belongs to their generation but is dislocated from it by her foreign birth and uprootedness. Martín Patino shares this precarious relation to the transition period, proving that "history does not belong primarily to time, nor to succession, nor to causality, but to community, or to being-in-common." *Los paraísos perdidos* centers on the intersection of the personal and the collective (Nancy, "Finite History" 143). Through this problematized being-in-common the film explores the limits of historical memory, questions Francoist legacy, and criticizes the Spanish Transition (*pacto del olvido*).

Another crucial dimension of *Los paraísos perdidos* is its intrinsic tie to Martín Patino's early films made in the midst of Francoism, especially *Nueve cartas a Berta* (1965). Characters, music, objects, actors, and the director of photography from *Nueve cartas a Berta* return to *Los paraísos perdidos*, forming an elaborate diegetic link with it. The protagonist, Ella, can be read as an uncanny embodiment of Berta, whose impact on the young law student Lorenzo, the protagonist of the earlier film (played by Emilio Gutiérrez Caba), prompts a series of reflections on the suffocating nature of provincial life, the Francoist status quo, and the general feeling of discontent that pervaded the dictatorship. But while Berta is central to Lorenzo's critical reflection in *Nueve cartas a Berta,* she never appears in the film, constituting its absent center. In 1985, twenty years later, Ella is back in Spain, searching for her "paraísos perdidos." Her unconditional demand to integrate the trauma of her parents' exile and death into Spain's historical memory disquiet those who refuse to remember. A collector of unpaid symbolic debt and a ghost from the past, she persists and disturbs both the individual and collective *pacto del olvido*.

Departing from the interconnectedness of the personal, collective, historical, and cinematic, this chapter will center on three main issues: on Martín Patino's cinema as cinema of space and time, on his innovative cinematography, and on his unique place in Spanish film history. Spaces of *Los paraísos perdidos* are spaces of memory, and time "is no longer the measure of movement but movement is the perspective of time" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 22). Martín Patino's cinematography is one of elaborate montage and sound manipulation. Through the use of light, color, and sound, Martín Patino shows that the nature of memory is intrinsically tied to the nature of representation and cinematic language. Finally, Martín Patino's importance in Spanish film history is not only tied to his crucial role in theoretical and practical innovations of the *New Spanish Cinema* (1960s) but also to his enduring and uncompromising ethical and political stance.

Spaces of Memory

Martín Patino's exploration of spaces of memory forsakes the action in favor of optical and sound descriptions, emphasizing "a specific weight of time operating inside characters and excavating them from within" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 23). The absence of the traditional plot as well as Martín Patino's insistence on affect and memory inscribes *Los paraísos perdidos* in the chronic rather than kinetic regime. Martín Patino's cinema is the cinema of the time-image where "the character has become a kind

of viewer . . . [that] records rather than reacts" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 3).[3] Furthermore, the characters' relation to history and memory is above all a relationship to time.

Among the most significant spaces of memory in *Los paraísos perdidos* are the old family house, the hospital (in which Ella's mother is dying), Miguel and Benito's houses (the space of "recuperated" friendships), and the Ministry of Culture (an encounter with a childhood acquaintance, a Socialist Minister of Culture). These spaces, which take on autonomous and material reality, are imbued with memory lost, regained, and displaced. Often inhabited by figures frozen in space that are captured in stills (still-frames) and accompanied by prolonged silences, the sites engender "a pressure on time itself, generating an affect of temporal anamorphosis, extending the dragging of time well beyond what we perceive as justified by the requirements of narrative movement" (Žižek, *The Fright* 102). The temporal anamorphosis is furthermore intensified through *Hyperion*, which Ella reads and translates in the hospital where her mother is dying, and which casts the consciousness of time as a modern phenomena. Like Hyperion himself, estranged from the direct contact with an origin, Ella is also a figure of perpetual displacement. She occupies the space of in-betweenness: both native and foreign, as if inhabiting the gap between *extranjera* (foreign) and *extraña* (strange) and the proliferations of these two terms (stranger, estranged, alien, queer, peculiar, and so on). Ella's attempt to fulfill her mother's death wish (rebuilding their family house as it was fifty years before, prior to their exile) is therefore complicated by her foreign birth, intricacies of motherland/motherhood, and complexities of linguistic and national boundaries.

Martín Patino's obsessive centering on the memory and history is thus inseparable from the questioning of the boundaries and limits of the community and the nation and their interplay. Ella's intellectual and cultural displacement and her nonbelonging paradoxically enable her to see. It is important to point out that the figure of displacement and restlessness, central to Martín Patino's cinema, is also always in contrast with the immobility of exterior surroundings. The muted green and gold tones of the landscape are imbued by the monotonous sameness (both within this particular film and in Martín Patino's opus in general): Toro, Zamora, Ávila, Salamanca, Madrid. The immobility of setting is thus contrasted to the inner restlessness of the characters.

The unbearable ethical pressure and weight of history are also seen through Ella's relationship to the city space. The town's inhabitants are bustling about; squares and streets are swarming with people (mobile framing). In contrast, her own roaming through the city is mostly rendered through long shots that minimize her figure. People saturating the

frame are strategically juxtaposed to her solitary figure. She therefore appears weighted down by history, and her minuteness and loneliness are emphasized by the striking formal composition.

Ella's perpetual displacement is juxtaposed to figures of conformity exemplified by her childhood friends Miguel and Benito, now settled into material, emotional, and political comfort. Once, they shared a common cultural-ideological space of anti-Francoism. Their former political/social engagement is, now, substituted by small compensations and their idealism by materialism. Their professions are quite significant: Benito is a high school teacher involved in the politics of education, and Miguel is a publisher, implicated in an industry that "controls the narrations that circulate and are disseminated" (Resina, "Short of Memory" 100). Martín Patino hence ties education, the publishing business, and politics to the problematic of the Transition and the loss of political ideals. Miguel and Benito, once committed forces of anti-Francoism, have sunk into material security and provincial mediocrity.[4] Martín Patino's choice of actors is also quite deliberate: Alfredo Landa and Miguel Narros. The former, an icon of shallow Spanish comedies of the 1970s (*cine de destape*) and the latter, a highbrow theater director. This reference is further highlighted by Landa's exaggerated acting style and repetition of the banal cliches so familiar from those films.

This intertextual reference could be read as a critique of both popular and high culture's inability to imagine a space for real social and political change. A visit to a Minister of Culture, another childhood acquaintance (played by Juan Diego) provides an example of Ella's failed effort to promote the importance of the cultural legacy. Ella's demand for the creation of a foundation that will house and give public access to her father's archive is a gesture against the conventionalization of the past and memory. Instrumental and pragmatic, the Minister of Culture speaks a different language, one that emphasizes strategizing, *disremembrance*, and willful amnesia. While she insists on the sociohistorical and affective importance of the archive, the minister talks about its inventorying and cataloguing. Significantly, their words overlap with background noise from the party meeting: budgets, allocations, financial reports, technical lexicon, facts, and statistics ("of the 37,124 public officials who are transferable, 12% belong to our ministry, [and] one can reckon that 40% of these 37,124 officials would have been transferred").

Issues of cultural legacy are drowned out while the minister, a figure of political consensus and a representative of the mnemonic politics of the Transition, advocates "change [as] the present's highest value" and illustrates that the "current debates on historic amnesia are not so much about the loss of the past as about the politics of memory" (Resina, "Short

of Memory" 86). Channeling her father's ghostly return, and despite the unwillingness that surrounds her, Ella embodies the unconditional demand to settle the symbolic debt. The Minister of Culture's willful amnesia and his refusal to integrate the trauma of exile and death into Spain's historical memory is futile since the dead return precisely when "they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 23).

The old family house is a space of contradiction, loneliness, missed encounters, desolation, and at last of renovation. Central both thematically and topographically, it stands in the very heart of the town, and is "at once a site of historical memory and a zone of socially created amnesia" (Resina, "Short of Memory" 102). Layered with an excess of memories, the house is ravaged by the effects of history. In ruins and devastated by time, it acquires a ghostly dimension, functioning as "the 'door of perception,' the screen through which another, purely fantasmatic dimension becomes perceptible" (Žižek, *The Fright* 39).

The ghostly emptiness of the house underscores Ella's void of subjectivity. This void is inseparable from the formal elements that construct it: slow pans, camera's circular movements (panoramic shot reminiscent of the famous 360-degree shot of Plaza Mayor from *Nueve cartas a Berta*), and immobilizing/freezing the character in space.[5] Ella's very first entrance into the house, the return to the house after her husband and daughter's departure for Germany, and the very last shot in which she is seen completing the translation of *Hyperion*, are the three scenes that capture the relationship between spectrality and the void of subjectivity. The continuous drift from object to object (courtyard, roofs, walls in the first two scenes and book, glasses, typewriter in the last one), marked by compressed time and extremely prolonged silence, gives the shot a sense of dreamscape: "The connection of the parts of space is not given, because it can come only from the subjective point of view of a character who is, nevertheless, absent, or has even disappeared, not simply out of frame, but passed into the void" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 8).[6] The sense of emptiness is intensified since the "space refers back again to the lost gaze of the being who is absent from the world as much as from himself" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 9).

Frozen in space and time, and not unlike Hyperion, Ella is faced with "the cold night of men" (*Hyperion* 169). Like Hyperion, she is also a stranger on earth. Ella's difference becomes Hölderlin's difference—"the difference of the one who differs within the identity of his time, within the identifiable of our time" (Nancy, "Hyperion's Joy" 63). Her void is inscribed as an irremediable dissonance with the outside. There is a continuous gap between Ella and her social environs. As Martín Patino emphasized, "I'm not speaking about the lost paradises of the physi-

cal realm, but rather I'd be speaking about the lost paradises as mental zones, the ones that are there in our subconscious" (Bellido López, 64). However, the end of *Los paraísos perdidos* is also the reassertion of life (that also fits Hölderlin's conception of natural cycles). The film is a passage from the insistence on the symbolic realm (justice to the dead, the past) to the radical self-withdrawal and finally to reintegration into the social universe.

The spectrality of the old family house also inscribes *Los paraísos perdidos* in a larger context. It is deeply embedded in a rich intertextual dialogue with Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena*, a groundbreaking film of the last years of the Franco dictatorship (1973). Intertextual allusion to *El espíritu de la colmena* does not stem solely from the political and spectral resemblance. The two films are also tied through Ana Torrent, an actress that plays young Ana in *El espíritu de la colmena* and Andrea, a town girl hired to help with organizing the archival materials, in *Los paraísos perdidos*. Significantly, Andrea's very first appearance in the film coincides with Víctor's (Ella's cousin) refusal to enter the old family house because it "is full of ghosts." Furthermore, the intercinematic reference to *El espíritu de la colmena* is strengthened through Andrea's startling resemblance to Ana. Her blank stare is almost identical to Ana's gaze in *Espíritu de la colmena*, where she is "shown always with the same impassive face: the dark, blank stare" (Smith, "Between Metaphysics" 35). As Paul Julian Smith observes, this look "comes from a simple, even mechanical technique: she is forbidden to smile on camera, and her gaze thus takes on a 'veil' of adult seriousness" ("Between Metaphysics" 36).[7] Martín Patino not only uses the same actress but relays on this very gesture in his homage to *El espíritu de la colmena*. Ana Torrent's eyes, so familiar to Spanish audiences, are now tied to another set of eyes, that of Charo López (Ella). Not only are both actresses inscribed in the "cinema of seer," but their connection illuminates complex ties within the history of Spanish film.[8] There are dense associations between the two sets of eyes (Ana/Andrea, Ella), and like Ana's, Ella's gaze "is [also] at once poetic and historical, experienced in isolation and as part of a community of spectators, of citizens" ("Between Metaphysics" 37). The connection of *Los paraísos perdidos* to its celebrated predecessor makes spectators aware of intricate articulations of time, history, and memory in the Spanish films from the Transition period onwards.

Cinematography

Hospital, Miguel and Benito's houses, the ministry of culture, and the old family house are spaces of memory that Martín Patino creates through

his unique cinematographic style. His unconventional and anomalous narrative syntax reveals that the nature of memory is fundamentally tied to the nature of representation. Thus, the overlapping of the past that Ella "remembers" and reconstructs and the present that she encounters upon her return are the result of an elaborate exercise of montage and sound manipulation.

This part of the chapter centers, above all, on Martín Patino's collaboration with three of his crew members: José Luis Alcaine (director of cinematography), Pablo García del Amo (editing), and Carmelo Bernaola (music). José Luis Alcaine's artistic vision, striking photography, and mise-en-scène highlight questions of historical truth, persistent erosion of memory, power, and disempowerment. His aesthetic innovations engage light, relief, volume, and color. Pablo García del Amo and Carmelo Bernaola imprint *Los paraísos perdidos* with their experimentation with sound, off-screen space, and the voice-over as a dislocating element. They experiment with sound's connection to bodies, sensations, pleasures, and affects. In *Los paraísos perdidos* Martín Patino also incorporates new technologies, foregrounding technological mediations in the process of its construction. The use of video, a trait so familiar from his documentaries, exposes the traces of the production process, its mechanisms, gaps, and stylistic innovations (at times prompted by economic limitations). His overwhelming use of nonprofessional actors, at times friends and at times famous personalities from the Spanish literary, cinematic, and political milieus, focuses on the questions of (cinematic) performance.

Before proceeding to the discussion of elements of film in *Los paraísos perdidos,* it is important to emphasize film's dual nature: its political/historical as well as poetical/lyrical dimension. It is telling that *Los paraísos perdidos* was filmed in 1985, between *Caudillo* (1974) and *Madrid* (1987), the second and the third films from Martín Patino's celebrated documentary trilogy. This "trilogy of remembrance," initiated with *Canciones para después de una guerra* in 1971, engages intensely with the Spanish past, recuperating collective and popular historical memory.[9] It also reveals what Manuel Vázquez Montalbán termed the *crónica sentimental de la España franquista*, through ingenious use of archival material (newsreel footage) together with voice-over personal memories, advertisements, popular film, and song.

While *Los paraísos perdidos* maintains the trilogy's concern with history, representation and politics, it also gives it a subjective, humanist turn. The fictional replaces the documentary, and high culture substitutes for the popular. The film introduces as its textual support a classic humanist text, familiar only to an elite audience. Hölderlin's *Hyperion* highlights the alienation, uprooting, and tragedy of the universal human

destiny, the eternal return of the same through the repetition of the cycles of nature, classical Greece, nature, love, beauty, and philosophy. These themes, condensed in Hyperion's famous line, "Nothing can grow like man, nothing so utterly wither away," also point to an existence faced with the withdrawal of the gods, the essential homelessness of modern man, and the inscription of death into existence.

In *Los paraísos perdidos* Martín Patino reconciles two areas of experience that were disjoined in his earlier filmography: the lyrical/subjective and the political/collective. These two realms are now superimposed or inscribed in each other. It is this particular insistence on the relationship between history and poetry, the universal and the concrete, that reveals Martín Patino's engagement with politics and history. In *Los paraísos perdidos*, the film's political connotations emerge precisely from its lyrical, transcendental dimension and from the tension between referentiality and abstraction.[10] As in the case of Ella, Martín Patino's personal, subjective, authorial dimension is inscribed into the national narrative.[11]

José Luis Alcaine

The articulation of, and tension between, the lyrical/subjective and the political/collective modes is also apparent in the theory and practice of José Luis Alcaine. Alcaine's cinematographic sensibility was considerably influenced by having lived in Tangier (he was born in Tetuán), where he worked in his father's photographic studio. Moreover, living in Tangier provided Alcaine access to films not shown in Spain due to Francoist censorship. He was well versed in films that were inaccessible to most other students in the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía (EOC) where he enrolled in 1963 upon his arrival to the Peninsula.

At EOC he had the chance to work with several directors connected to the New Spanish Cinema, and his collaboration with Basilio Martín Patino dates from those times. They met during the shooting of *Nueve cartas a Berta*, and Alcaine's black and white photos were used as a narrative device in the film, appearing as stills to separate segments between the letters. For Alcaine, the encounter with Luis Cuadrado, who was considered the EOC's most accomplished student and director of photography, was one of the decisive moments in his career. Alcaine points out that "Cuadrado's method signaled in Spain the beginnings of a style that was already being tried in Europe . . . a legacy of the 'Nouvelle Vague,' but subsequently developed in color and natural interiors, whereby an attempt was made to take advantage of the light they contained with very soft and indirect lighting" (Heredero, *El lenguaje de la luz* 70). Notably,

Alcaine's preference for indirect lighting is influenced by Cuadrado's: "I was interested in recovering part of Cuadrado's innovations, only extending them a bit further: I wanted to aim for a lighting that was indirect but at the same time directed" (Heredero, *El lenguaje de la luz* 71). While Cuadrado achieved indirect lighting through reflecting it off "the complex combination of white cards, sheets, or translucent papers" (for which he earned the moniker *el burrito blanco*), Alcaine used an umbrella to achieve this effect, acquiring the nickname *el paragüero*.[12] Given this influence, Alcaine developed a keen awareness of the centrality of light and lighting, undervalued yet crucial to cinematographic practice despite the neglect of this component by veteran directors in Spain.[13] In addition to lighting, Alcaine's aesthetic innovations also engage color, and through the intersection of these two elements, he created what became one of his most recognizable traits: cinema of relief and volume.

Besides working on *Los paraísos perdidos*, Alcaine was also involved in several film projects of the 1980s that were motivated by the urgency to articulate more reflexive and candid mnemonic politics with regard to the individual and the nation. According to Jesús González Requena, this turn to the problematic of memory and history underscores the importance of "the construction of atmospheres at once recognizable and magical, which interrogate the self-assured settings of the past while at the same time inscribing the (necessarily dramatic) subjectivity of the person who remembers" ("La conciencia del color en la fotografía cinematográfica española" 161). Alcaine's talent lies precisely in the ability to capture this intersection of the recognizable and the magical. Through a skillful blend of the two Alcaine accentuates the fragile boundary separating individual and collective memory, poetry, and history.

This recuperation of historical memory is inseparable from formal questions, among which the issue of color play stands out. Alcaine opts for "subtle, nuanced, and warm colors; as well as a trend to an intimate, atmospheric, and metaphorical photography" (González Requena, "La conciencia del color" 122). This choice was partially inspired by the desire for rupture with the two dominant tendencies of the 1960s: "granitic greys of Francoism and Kodak-colorized consumerism" (González Requena, "La conciencia del color" 122).

In *Los paraísos perdidos*, the tension between referentiality and abstraction (or the recognizable and the magical) is created through the abovementioned intimate photography as well as Alcaine's unique color matrix (blue/gray and gold/orange). Beyond historical factors, Alcaine's personal obsession with Spanish painting influences the mood that he achieves through the accentuation of shadow and relief, akin to Velázquez's *Las*

Meninas, "a painting that has always consumed me, in which the light gradually creates a wonderfully rich range of tones" (Heredero, "José Luis Alcaine" 73). Some of the most striking scenes of *Los paraísos perdidos* that reflect this tendency include: the translation of *Hyperion* in the old family house, the announcement of Ella's mother's death, the sequence of shots of a dollhouse from her childhood, and the moments spent with Víctor and Sonia (Ella's daughter) following the mother's funeral.

The scenes of Ella translating *Hyperion* in the old family house are striking in their chromatic density. There is a marked distinction between, on the one hand, the inner, subjective mood emanating from the lyrical quality of the text, and her wasted, dreary surroundings, on the other. She is lit in warm orange, golden tones that contrast with the background of cold blue and gray. The blue/gray colors evoke a cold and distanced universe, underscoring a sense of uneasiness. The light of the night lamp envelops her, separating her figure from the background and adding to the overriding atmosphere of alienation. She sits at the table, cluttered with the tools of her trade: a German edition of *Hyperion*, her glasses, a typewriter, coffee cups, various boxes, archives. Light becomes a protagonist and the shadow accentuates both the objects and her face. Furthermore, as González Requena has observed, in *Los paraísos perdidos*, "the actress's features explode in depth: the blackness of her hair and eyes, the noble rigidity of her factions" ("La conciencia del color" 163). Ella's features are pronounced, but at the same time Alcaine favors soft contours over harsh and precise delineation. The objects that surround her and the elements of her face (eyes, nose, ears, hair, lips, cheekbones) form a peculiar still life, what Gilles Deleuze refers to as: "a composition of objects which are wrapped up in themselves or become their own container" (*Cinema 2* 16). In this way, the formal composition mirrors the director's thematic concerns, which are manifest in the voice-over from *Hyperion*: "In my heart I constructed a tomb so that I could rest there. I closed myself in like a larva, for outside there exists only winter." Alcaine himself explains that the turn to still life/painting is instrumental to his recreation of "los paraísos perdidos," providing a pictorial dimension in keeping with the temporal structure of the film:

> The basic idea that beats behind *Los paraísos perdidos* is the recovery of a time in the past which now, from the present, must be recreated in a sensory way and through new eyes. We needed to reconstruct a certain pictorial resonance, and painting has a quality more helpful in this sense than film. It was necessary to use lighting to find the pictorial dimension that would help

> stop time in the past so that memory could be transported back towards an impenetrable time, fixed as in a painting and hard to decipher. (Heredero, "Jose Luis Alcaine" 82)

Ella's relationship to history and memory, as well as her relationship to other characters, is also conceptualized chromatically. For example, Ella's relationship to Andrea acquires an uncanny dimension at the time of her mother's death. The news of her passing comes from a messenger in the street: a drab outside reality, intensified by an early gray winter morning that intrudes upon the chromatic density of the interior. The foreboding ambience is constructed through shot-reverse shot takes of Andrea descending the staircase toward Ella, who is standing next to the front window. Andrea's ghostly appearance, reinforced through intracinematic reference to Ana from *El espíritu de la colmena*, is strengthened further through the cinematographer's use of light. Enveloped at first by intense blue, then engulfed in profound darkness, Andrea seems more spectral than human. Meanwhile, Ella is bathed in golden tones as light from the window invades the space around her. Through the interplay of blues and golds and light and darkness, the contour of the surrounding objects loses form: "Space muddles its directions, its orientations, and loses all primacy of the vertical axis that could determine them" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 266). Reality itself acquires a ghostly quality, revealing the sinister, uncanny dimension brought about by the announcement of her mother's death.

In contrast to the color matrix of this scene, the mother's funeral is rendered in a series of washed-out greens. The outside, barely glimpsed through the window in the previous segment, now occupies an entire frame—a moment in the film in which the sky becomes more pronounced than ever before. A tremulous gray morning in a sparse and desolate winter communicates the moods of the mourners at the funeral. The take is typical of Alcaine's rendition of Castile, where "the roughness, the rough essence of the Castilian landscapes comes from the use of black, of its juxtaposition with the lights of dusk (or with the bluer lights of dawn), which make up the film's landscapes." (González Requena, "La conciencia del color" 162).

The Castilian harshness that envelops the funeral scene transforms abruptly into one of the most lyrical moments of *Los paraísos perdidos*. What follows is a sequence of Víctor and Sonia running through the very bare forest where just moments earlier the mourners had stood. The two characters resemble black apparitions floating in an ethereal space through which radiant splendor flows. We are once again in Alcaine's poetic and golden-hued universe, which includes Ella, who sits nearby reading silently from her text.

The relation between golden tones and this recurrent spectral atmosphere also emerges in the subsequent shot of the dollhouse, a relic of the old family home. Alcaine juxtaposes two realities once again: the dreary darkness of the family house in opposition to the gold and orange doll house, which acquires an appearance of cinematic image or even a theatrical aura. In this sense, the superimposition of two spaces brings together both reality and spectrality.

It is important to note that the interplay of the recognizable and the magical characteristic of *Los paraísos perdidos* is constructed by Alcaine within the limits of what he calls "a logic of illumination." As Carlos Heredero has remarked: "José Luis Alcaine is obsessed with the creation of volume through light . . . that light should be at once true-to-life and expressive, intentional and believable." ("José Luis Alcaine" 65). Thus, Alcaine works mostly with natural interiors and available light. His philosophy of lighting combines creativity and verisimilitude, and in accordance with a logic of illumination emphasizes the relationship between the source of light and the object filmed. Alcaine opposes the use of filters and multiple shadows. He advocates a strong contrast between light and shadow, but one achieved paradoxically through soft lighting. Such a theory of representation informs his intricate crafting of "reality" and the "recognizible," echoing the ideas of Luis Cuadrado: "Film cannot reproduce things just as they naturally are; that natural quality . . . must be invented, recreated, and this must be done artificially, with equipment, with lights, with filters, with gauzes, with emulsions" (Barroso, "Entrevista con Luis Cuadrado" 229).

These preoccupations with verisimilitude and its invention are articulated in *Los paraísos perdidos* through Víctor, Ella's young cousin who incessantly observes and records reality from a distance through the lens of his video camera. Furthermore, Alcaine renders Víctor and Ella's first meeting by superimposing their images as the voice-in-off recites from *Hyperion*: "I thank you for asking me to tell you about myself, because in doing so I will recall times past. That is what made me come back: I wanted to live closer to the setting of my childhood games." In doing so, he suggests that Ella and Víctor embody a postmodern version of Hyperion and Belarmine, in which Víctor is a recipient and mediator of Ella's memory work. Víctor's presence thus reiterates memory's inseparability from mediation; it is always already recreated and reconstructed. This mediation is highlighted further by the materiality and texture of the video footage, that is, by the emulsion, light, and grain of the video camera.

Víctor's central role in *Los paraísos perdidos* is reinforced by his witnessing of Ella's encounter with Lorenzo—an encounter that weaves together *Nueve cartas a Berta* and *Los paraísos perdidos*. Significantly, this is

the moment in which Martín Patino himself appears in the film to oversee the encounter between the main characters of his two most influential works: "Aparezco en *Los paraísos perdidos* porque quiero ser testigo del encuentro de 'Ella' con el protagonista de *Nueve cartas a Berta*" (Bellido López, *Basilio Martín Patino* 106). Víctor videotapes the encounter, his camera viewfinder framing the images of the scene. The restless camera resignifies the objective shot into a subjective one. In the words of Žižek: "What the spectator first perceives as an objective shot . . . is all of a sudden, by means of codified markers like the slight trembling of the camera, the 'subjectivized' soundtrack, etc., revealed as the subjective shot . . ." (*The Fright* 35).[14] Víctor, the video enthusiast and manipulator of images, recalls other figures of film directors, who appear as characters in Martín Patino's work: Hugo Escribano from *Seducción del caos* (TV) and Hans from *Madrid* (documentary).

The visual and thematic overlapping between Ella and Lorenzo, Berta and Lorenzo, the Salamanca of the 1960s and the Salamanca of the 1980s, *Los paraísos perdidos* and *Nueve cartas a Berta*, and film and video media contributes to the complexity of the scene. This bridging of temporal and spatial divides activates what has previously been represented as a mere epistolary fantasy.[15] Ultimately, the insertion of two film directors (the fictional Víctor and Martín Patino himself) demonstrates that the nature of memory is intrinsically tied to the nature of representation, underscoring the fragile and complex construction of reality.

Pablo García del Amo: Sounds and Silences.

Hyperion provides the main audio support of the film, making up its voice-over and constituting the main component of the otherwise sparse soundtrack. At times the voice-over is in harmony with its visual support—meaning there is a correspondence between the text heard and the character seen reading the text. It also functions, however, as a distancing and dislocating element and foregrounds incongruities already present at the core of the film. It is a voice-over that hampers and disturbs, rather than explains and sutures.

It is significant that Martín Patino chose an epistolary novel as the textual support of *Los paraísos perdidos*. This choice not only ties it to *Nueve cartas a Berta* (in which Lorenzo's letters are the core of the film) and to *Espíritu de la colmena* (which features a mother's incessant letter writing); it also serves Martín Patino's challenging and defiant aesthetic. Hölderlin's epistolary text consists of a series of letters from Hyperion to Belarmin. Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us that "Hyperion's form is in all

respects that of allegory in the sense that Benjamin identified: writing about a world of broken fragments, all referring to each other without forming an organic form" ("Hyperion's Joy" 77). The original text, already fragmentary, is further fragmented through the use of another medium (film) and function (voice-over).

To read the fragments from *Hyperion*, Martín Patino has chosen Charo López, the actress who plays Ella in the film. This produces a fascinating multiplying effect. López's voice is not only heard in the dialogues within the film itself; it is heard reading *Hyperion* in the voice-over while in the frame Ella sits silently reading this epistolary novel. Her voice reading *Hyperion* is also heard in the background as Ella wanders through the city or during scenes in which she does not appear at all. The complexity of the voice-over, as Pablo García del Amo remarks, is matched by the technical difficulties that it posed:

> When the structure of the film gained certain solidity, we took on the task of introducing the voice of SHE parsing the paragraphs of "Hiperión." It is here that the most complex part of the editing process took place. It was a question of establishing a dividing line between the explicit, obvious or explanatory, and the implicit that could carry a greater metaphoric meaning. (Bellido López, *Basilio Martín Patino* 221)

This uncanny redoubling of Charo López's voice, a voice dwelling in a void of self-reflection, gives the impression that Ella coexists with her spectral shadow or that she is haunted by her shadowy double. The most unsettling moments occur when her voice seems to emanate from another character. No longer anchored in Ella, no longer fused with her body, the voice becomes imbued with melancholy (see Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*). Furthermore, when her voice becomes attached to another character or withdraws into the background (landscape or city shots) we get the effect of an acoustic equivalent to the free-floating gaze described by Žižek in which a point-of-view shot is not "clearly allocated as the point of view of some protagonist" (*The Fright* 33).

The multiplications and complexities of the voice-over contrast with the film's prolonged silences. There are long, drawn-out silent shots in which the camera pans across the city and the surrounding countryside. There is also ambient silence and the subtle kinds of noises that accompany it: dripping water, Ella's footsteps, and the sound of her typewriter. These formal elements correspond to the thematic ones: "a massive investment in silence that characterized the *pacto del olvido*" (Resina, "Short of Memory" 119). It follows that music is also quite sparse and economical. There are only a few

musical themes, infused by Carmelo Bernaola's avant-garde touch: Bach's aria "Erbarme Dich, mein Gott!" from *St. Matthew's Passion*; Domenico Scarlatti's "Sonata no. 41"; Amancio Prada and Agustín García Calvo's "Libre te quiero"; and "Del amor y Salamanca," mostly, though, as accompaniment of silence and solitude.[16]

As seen, Pablo García del Amo, one of Spain's foremost film editors, created the audio universe of *Los paraísos perdidos* through a complex intertwining of the *Hyperion* voice-over, ambient silence, music, and subtle noise. The above elements enter into rivalry, overlap, supplement each other, as well as cross and transform into each other, thus making the spectator aware that "the audiovisual image is not a whole, it is 'a fusion of the tear' " (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 268). The traumatic event, Ella's encounter with the "past," is inscribed in the very form of the film, its spectral voice-over. Spain's ghostly history emerges from the uncanny poetic effect of these acoustic and visual "inconsistencies" and the ambiguities and interstices of the voice-over.

Conclusion: *El pacto del olvido*

Los paraísos perdidos, filmed in mid-1980s, was symptomatic of the decade's rising concern with the past in the rapidly changing Spain of the post-Transition period.[17] The film calls for a revision of the Spanish Transition, insisting on a settling of its ghostly accounts. It was a past that was falling victim to the current climate of amnesia and forgotten even by many of those who had once praised Martín Patino's work. Martín Patino's target in this film is precisely the elite audience that once applauded *Canciones para después de una guerra*—a progressive bourgeoisie, the socioeconomic class that institutionalized him earlier as an anti-Francoist auteur. Within this context, his later films have been troubling for those who were once his political and ideological allies. This is especially noticeable when one compares *Los paraísos perdidos* to several other films of the Transition—overwhelmingly literary adaptations, which consciously or unconsciously supported the politics of amnesia. For example, Mario Camus (*La colmena*, 1982 and *Los santos inocentes*, 1984) and Vicente Aranda (*Tiempo de silencio*, 1986). As Vicente José Benet observes, "They put forth a kind of reflection on the past which, although critical at times, seemed perfectly integrated with the ideological premises of the consensus of the transition" ("La nueva memoria: imágenes de la memoria en el cine español de la transición" 4).[18] Martín Patino's critical power derives from the sheer persistence of his vision, increasingly divergent from the abovementioned revisions of the past.

A particularly effective strategy of Martín Patino's is his use of nonprofessional actors as well as famous figures from the Spanish literary, cinematic, and political scene. The result is a powerful gesture that questions the boundary between fiction and reality, the public and the private, the cinematic and the historical. *Los paraísos perdidos* stars an impressive array of famous actors, politicians, singers, and theater directors, who were politically outspoken members of Martín Patino's own generation: Paco Rabal, Alfredo Landa, Charo López, Amancio Prada, Miguel Narros, Juan Cueto. Their own political engagement at times corresponds to the characters they play in the film and at times contradicts them. This ambiguity between reality and fiction, truth and appearance manifested itself in personal and political tensions lived out on the film set. Another public figure of great interest in *Los paraísos perdidos* is Walter Haubricht, who plays Ella's estranged husband. Haubricht was a correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Spain, and his appearance in the film points to the important role that the foreign press played in the last years of Francoism and during the Transition, in particular the role of the SPD (German Socialist Party) in the rise to power of Felipe González's PSOE in Spain. He is also a model for Hans, a protagonist of *Madrid*, Martín Patino's next film. Hans is played in *Madrid* by Rüdiger Vogler, an actor closely associated with Wim Wenders films. Furthermore, the figure of the foreign journalist, as Colmeiro observes, "is squarely located within the tradition of the documentary filmmakers, reporters, and foreign correspondents working in Spain in the thirties, whose participation and ideological commitment often took them beyond simply serving as eyewitnesses to someone else's reality" ("Los montajes de la memoria" 129). In this regard, Haubricht's commitment to the PSOE's politics resonates ironically in the husband's uncomprehending, nearly vacant look at Ella's past in the film.

This multiplication of cinematic, historical, and political references creates a reflexive structure and points, once again, to Martín Patino's tendency to transgress the boundaries between (historical) documentary and fiction. Martín Patino ties the question of historical memory to the question of form: fiction documents and documentary fictionalizes. In questioning generic conventions, Martín Patino realizes what Žižek has described as the "ultimate achievement of film art"—that is, "not to recreate reality within the narrative fiction [. . .] but, on the contrary, to make us discern the fictional aspect of reality itself, to experience reality itself as fiction" (*The Fright* 77).

Social reality and its relation to symbolic fiction has always been one of Martín Patino's central concerns. Martín Patino successfully disturbed two hegemonies: late Francoism and the Transition, pointing out what lingered unearthed in the national narrative. Both a manipulator of

images and a collector of fragments from the past, Martín Patino is an archaeologist of lost knowledge.[19] Like Hölderlin, the poet who enacted remembrance and recollection, Martín Patino shows that "remembering is inseparable from distorting and forgetting" (Resina, "Short of Memory" 88). Martín Patino's insistence on the reencounter with the phantoms of the past is at odds with a present-day Spain still marked by zones of amnesia and an ambiguous politics of memory.

Martín Patino is a voice of intrusion and disruption, and his cinema one of disarticulation and reinscription. Martín Patino's incessant questioning, provocative filmmaking, innovative form, self-reflexive and discontinuous practice of montage, distancing effects, and ethical persistence are precisely what grant him a singular place in the history of Spanish cinema. Tempted neither by amnesia nor by the politics of euphoria, Martín Patino's posture is striking in its absolute fidelity to his core set of beliefs. It is a cinema of return and repetition and of imperviousness to fickle political fashions. One of Martín Patino's more recent "returns," *Los paraísos perdidos*, constitutes a gesture of epistemological, ethical, and cinematic necessity.

Notes

1. In both the film and the script, the protagonist, played by Charo López, is referred to as "Ella," meaning "she." Throughout the chapter I will be using this designation.

2. For an elaborate account on contemporary Spain and the politics of memory, see the collection of essays edited by Joan Ramon Resina: *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*.

3. Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the time-image centers on the representation of time in cinema that emerged after World War II. Deleuze contrasts the emphasis on the time-image in this period with the predominance of the movement-image in prewar cinema. He points out that "the time-image does not imply the absence of movement (even though it often includes its increased scarcity) but the reversal of its subordination; it is movement which subordinates itself to time" (*Cinema 2* 271). On the concept of time-image, see especially Deleuze's first chapter, "Beyond the Movement-Image," in *Cinema 2*.

4. In a similar vein, Lorenzo's father (*Nueve cartas a Berta*), once a promising young writer, ends up working in a bank with his literary aspirations reduced to writing the sports pages for his provincial newspaper.

5. According to Román Gubern, this take is indebted to Jean-Luc Godard's shot of Jean-Paul Belmondo in the multitude waiting for Eisenhower at the Champs Elysées in *À bout de souffle* (1959). For more detailed discussion, see Gubern: *1936–1939: La guerra de España en la pantalla*. In *Nueve cartas a Berta* it is a panoramic shot (360

degrees) of Lorenzo's father at the Plaza Mayor. The father is the camera's point of departure and also its final descent.

6. Significantly, Deleuze's comment on the disconnected space is about Antonioni's *Story of a Love Affair*, a film that had considerable influence both on Martín Patino and on the *Spanish New Cinema* of the 1960s.

7. Paul Julian Smith draws on Francisco Umbral's interview with Ana Torrent. For more detailed discussion of Ana Torrent and issues of cinematic performance, see Smith's chapter "Between Metaphysics and Scientism: Rehistoricizing Víctor Erice," in *The Moderns*.

8. For example, Alejandro Amenábar's *Tesis* is an implicit contemporary homage to Ana Torrent's eyes.

9. The film was authorized for release in 1976. "Approved in June of 1971 by the Board of Censorship with a rating of 'appropriate for all audiences' and 'especially interesting film,' it was later banned by the Administration of the State until August 31, 1976, the date it was first licensed for exhibition" (Bellido López 231).

10. Some of the questions that Basilio Martín Patino poses through *Los paraísos perdidos* have been previously articulated by Víctor Erice, a filmmaker of "poetic abstractions and metaphysical absorptions," as well as of concrete materiality (Smith, "Between Metaphysics" 26). Paul Julian Smith historicizes the reception of *El espíritu de la colmena*, and his chapter centers on the complex Spanish responses to the film as well as its increasingly abstracted readings. Significantly, he points out that "Erice's poetic abstraction and metaphysical absorbtion were easily co-opted by the Right even under the Socialist government of the 1980s" ("Between Metaphysics" 26).

11. *Los paraísos perdidos* was filmed in 1985, the very same year of the creation of Martín Patino's own production company, *La Linterna Mágica*.

12. For an in-depth discussion of Luis Cuadrado's theory of representation, see Paul Julian Smith's chapter, "Between Metaphysics and Scientism: Rehistoricizing Víctor Erice," in *The Moderns*. Also, see Jesús González Requena's article "La conciencia del color en la fotografía cinematográfica española," and Jaime Barroso's interview with Cuadrado in Francisco Llinás: *Directores de fotografía del cine español*.

13. See Heredero's interview with Alcaine: "José Luis Alcaine: La luz que crea relieve."

14. The standard horror movie technique. For more see Žižek's second chapter, "Back to the Suture," in *The Fright of Real Tears*.

15. Real(izing) the fantasy renders it banal, quite explicit in Lorenzo's proposal to archive the cultural legacy of her father via multinational giant Coca-Cola or an American university.

16. "Del amor y Salamanca," a popular Castillian music, is imbued by Carmelo Bernaola's avant-garde touch. This theme also appears in *Nueve cartas a Berta*, adding yet another intertextual touch to the film. Regarding music and solitude, Martín Patino had explained that: "Right from the start I had this violin adagio in mind for the scene where she remains alone" (Bellido López 193).

17. See Salvador Cardús i Ros: "Politics and the Invention of Memory. For a Sociology of the Transition to Democracy in Spain." For the larger European context and its concern with "places of memory, monuments, landscape, traumatic experiences,

holocaust revisionism and counter-revisionism, museum politics," and so on, see Joan Ramon Resina's "Introduction" to *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*. Also see Resina and Ulrich Winter: *Casa encantada: Lugares de memoria en la España constitucional (1978–2004)*.

18. It could be argued that not all the films that Vicente José Benet mentions in his article "La nueva memoria: imágenes de la memoria en el cine español de la transición" support the politics of amnesia, for example, Francesc Bertriu's *La Plaça del Diamant*, 1981.

19. Like Hans, the protagonist of *Madrid* who claims "I am like an archaeologist piecing together shards of pottery."

8

(M)Othering Strategies in *El pájaro de la felicidad* (Pilar Miró, 1993)

Jaume Martí-Olivella

Introduction: Three Critical Avenues into Pilar Miró's *El pájaro de la felicidad*

In revisiting Pilar Miró's *El pájaro de la felicidad* (*The Bird of Happiness*, 1993) more than a decade after my first critical appraisal of the film,[1] I still feel the need to highlight its political subtext: the (im)possibility and urgency of a multicultural and transnational dialogue in Spain. Despite some tentative political gestures, such a dialogue has not yet happened, and it is as crucial and urgent today as it ever was before. Thus, my first critical avenue into Pilar Miró's allegorical and partly autobiographical film will be the geopolitical. In choosing Carmen Figueres, a Catalan female art restorer, as protagonist of her film, Miró is directly contributing to such a dialogue. As she herself put it: "Sometimes, from Madrid, Catalan culture appears to be very distant and remote, and I believe that is not the case" (Llopart 42). To remain true to that statement, Miró, who had never professed any special sympathies toward Catalonia's cinematic policies,[2] decided to emphasize Carmen's (Mercedes Sampietro) Catalan origins by shooting and releasing parts of her film with direct sound in Catalan and with Castilian subtitles. And she did that as if it was a normal practice and not a complete anomaly within the mostly monolingual Spanish

Fig. 8. Framing Carmen Figueres (Mercedes Sampietro) in Pilar Miró's painterly film *El pájaro de la felicidad*. Courtesy of ANOLA Films.

cinema. This transgressive linguistic gesture is diegetically complemented or, as we will see below, compromised, by having Carmen return home, to Ripoll, in the Catalan Pyrenees, where she will seek her own restoration after the sexual assault that launches the film's narrative. It is within this idyllic and impossible return home that Carmen will clash with her mother, who becomes a narrative specter of Francoism and quite an improbable character given her Castilian monolinguism in the midst of rural Catalonia. I will return to that contradiction later. Let it suffice to say here that this peculiar "mother-daugher plot"[3] takes place not in the absence of the father figure, as was the case in most of Miró's earlier films, but in the very face of the most idealized representation of a father figure in the director's entire career. If, as Iain Chambers claims, the true difference of the migrant subject is her/his impossible homecoming (5), Carmen's return home highlights at the same time her (be)longing and her migrancy. In search of inner healing, a bit like Miró herself, Carmen will need to leave her central location (as an art restorer in Madrid) and relocate in the margins of the body politic, literally in its Northern and Southern borders: by the Catalan Pyrenees and by the Andalusian coast. The fact that Nani, Carmen's daughter-in-law and her newfound object of desire, is Italian, duplicates (and magnifies) the reversed symmetry of Miró's North/South geopolitical design by extending her allegorical tale to include Spain's (new) European romance.[4]

The second critical avenue points toward Miró's transgressive "pietà": her narrative inscription of the Kristevan "stabat mater" in her most consistent gesture of (m)otherly resistance. My reference to Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical reading of Christian iconography is made specially necessary by Miró's decision to frame her personal story in a highly stylized "painterly film" where the restoration of Murillo's painting of the embrace between the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth becomes the most emblematic metaphor. As we shall see later, the loving approach between Carmen and Nani is narratively anticipated by Carmen's restoration of and Nani's fascination with Murillo's painting. Miró's quasi-ekphrastic rendition is further elaborated through her privileging other senses over the gaze. As Kristeva has it:

> Du corps virginal nous n'aurons droit qu'à l'oreille, aux larmes at aux seins. Que l'organe sexuel féminin se soit transformé en cette innocente coquille réceptacle du son, peut éventuellement contribuer à érotiser l'écoute, la voix, voire l'entendement. Mais, du même mouvement, la sexualité se trouve rebaissé au rang de sous-entendu. L'expérience sexuelle féminine s'ancre ainsi dans l'universalité du son. ("Stabat Mater" 311)

In *El pájaro de la felicidad*, hearing and touch share protagonism with sight in the creation of a love story between two women who, like Mary and Elizabeth, are brought together by the love of the same child. And yet, as I have indicated elsewhere,[5] Miró's modern "pietà" transcends traditional mariology's sacrificial logic in an "obscene" way, in the sense given to this term by Kristeva's reading of Bataille's artistic practice:

> Le récit moderne n'est pas essentiellement une performance technique comme le nouveau roman a voulu nous le faire croire dans son effritement pointilleux. Le récit moderne (de Joyce à Bataille) a une visée post-théologique: communiquer la fulguration amoureuse. Celle oú "Je" s'élève aux dimensions paranoïdes de la divinité sublime, tout en étant près de l'effondrement abject, du degoût de soi. Ou tout simplement de sa version modérée qu'est la solitude. ("Bataille solaire" 457–58)

Solitude is indeed the most persistent version of Pilar Miró's narrative abjection. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that at the heart of *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos* (*Gary Cooper, Who Art in Heaven*, 1980), her most clearly autobiographic film, we encounter Andrea, again

played by Mercedes Sampietro, directing a television adaptation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis clos*, a play where the other appears both as hell and as redemption: "We will remain in solitude together till the end" (41), says one of Sartre's tortured characters, while another one exclaims: "None of us can be saved alone" (63). In fact, all of Pilar Miró's cinematic work, as I mentioned earlier, may be understood as an artistic "mise-en-abîme" of the public/private tension, of the tension between her abjected sense of solitude and her passionate public commitment. Thus, her constant representation of (m)otherly resistance. It is precisely as a mother that she constructs herself as mostly other to all societal norms. That is why Carmen has rejected motherhood as a social imposition at the beginning of *El pájaro de la felicidad*, and that is also why she finally chooses to become a mother to her grandson at the end of the film. In the middle, however, there is the story of her own sexual desire, of an "obscene/hors-scène" tale of same-sex love that mostly happens off-screen, understated but ekphrastically narrated via the healing touch of Murillo's painting and that of Carmen's cure of Nani's injury.

My third critical avenue into Pilar Miró's film deals with the complex textual inscriptions of violence, that is, the violence of representation and the representation of violence. As stated by Françoise Heinz in one of the earliest critical readings of Miró's work, violence in its multiple occurrences becomes the central motif in most of her films, and, especially, in her first two: *La petición* (*The Request*, 1976) and *El crimen de Cuenca* (*The Cuenca Crime*, 1979).[6] Some of the violent aspects depicted in such films help us understand what kind of personal and social injuries are in need of healing once we reach the time of *El pájaro de la felicidad*. And, most importantly, it is the very violence of the ideological superstructure that gets both inscribed and denounced in those two initial films. Thus, *La petición* offers a clear example of marriage as social imposition while *El crimen de Cuenca* underlines the blindness of a criminal system that relies on hearsay and political influence.

El pájaro de la felicidad: Pilar Miró's Cinematic Self-Portrait

> Now that Pilar Miró has died her amazing professional biography unfolds in front of our eyes: it is so full of achievements, so multidisciplinary and spectacular that the profile of its shadow will not fade away easily. There is not a single aspect of visual arts that Pilar Miró did not touch. The only thing Pilar Miró did not do was painting, although, as I mentioned once, she was a distinguished wedding painter, with a luxurious and precise pre-Raphaelite palette. (Amela 22)

El pájaro de la felicidad is Pilar Miró's painting. It is a self-portrait in disguise, although this disguise is yet another form of self-revelation: "The truth is that I see myself more and more in this film" (Miró in Fernández 32). With this heading, Rafa Fernández started his chronicle of what were then the initial steps in the shooting of *El pájaro de la felicidad*: "Pilar Miró is very busy in what she considers to be her film/therapy, the one that marks the dividing line between her past and a new life" (Fernández 32). The violent sexual aggression against Carmen is the traumatic event that marks this before-and-after in her life. In the context of the director's own life, however, the film appears both as a therapeutic exercise in recollecting and refiguring past traumas and also, perhaps especially, as her most serene and meditated "non serviam," her separate peace after the personal price paid for serving in public offices with a political ideal that she, among many other Spaniards, felt had been mostly betrayed. That is why, I believe, *El pájaro de la felicidad* starts with a collective aggression of very personal dimensions. And that is also why the entire film is an in-depth exploration of the injuries of history—in this case, of a personal history whose collective ramifications may be easily implied. Stylistically, to return to the film's textuality and to Miró's exacting framing, the gesture of confronting the injury and our collective implication is represented by the way the sexual attack is constructed with Carmen's violent frontal close-up, which is doubly representative after the series of shots from behind in which we have both felt her estrangement and her vulnerability. The entire sequence is visually structured to emphasize Carmen's (m)otherly behavior: her having left behind (given her back to) her traditional motherly duties. Her visit to Enrique, as her son reminds us and her, is prompted by his need of money. The fact that Carmen did not even know Nani and the child they had just had is also foregrounded in the first "pietà" of the film: the moment of Nani's breastfeeding interrupted by Carmen's arrival. Her "failure" as a mother is underlined by her failed gesture to hold the baby in her arms. Thus, it is the impossibility and/or unwillingness to fulfill her maternal contract, to accept the patriarchal logic of sacrifice, that gets framed as Carmen's social "crime." The sexual aggression that follows, in this sense, acquires an additional register of anonymous, collective revenge.

More than anything else, *El pájaro de la felicidad* becomes a remarkable example of feminist autobiography, in the sense that it describes the search for self-knowledge as a performance: a staging of the fiction of the self. Miró's film acts as a mirror that reflects an image that is not entirely "self-coincident." Thus, when Carmen, staring into Fernando's eyes and through them into our own, during the sequence that follows her brutal sexual attack, echoes his rather emotionless "qué pasa?" ("What is the matter?") with the same words charged with new and deeper meaning,

we are given an illustration of countertransference, in the sense given to the term by Catherine Davies' reading of Philip Lejeune's *Le pacte autobiographique*. Understood as a textual mirror, Miró's film ceases to function only as a transferential projection in order to answer back, to question both the analyst and the analysand. The Freudian contract no longer prevails. There is not a single source of authority wherein the cure may reside. In fact, not only does Carmen return the male gaze, she does it while inhabiting both the Freudian "lack" and the empty space of a supposedly failed motherhood. In "La piedad profana de Pilar Miró," I referred to *El pájaro de la felicidad* as the culmination of Miró's career. Here, I would like to revisit that statement while relating it to the three major textual strategies, which, according to Catherine Davies, constitute the basis of an "autogynography": mimesis, fragmentation, and manifesto.[7] These three terms may very well serve to describe Miró's entire cinematic output. Indeed, the director was well known for her capacity to mimic the male gaze, to engage in cinematic texts that masqueraded as masculine exercises in performing the violence of representation. *El crimen de Cuenca*, *Beltenebros* (*Prince of Shadows*, 1991), and, to a certain extent, *Tu nombre envenena mis sueños* (*Your Name Poisons My Dreams*, 1996), all belong in that category. The intimacy and fragmented quality of the confessional journal is indeed one of the basic structuring principles behind what I have termed Miró's lyrical segment, mostly seen in the sequence created by *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos*, *Werther*, and *El pájaro de la felicidad*. It is this last film, however, that completes the triangular strategy by becoming a true manifesto: the public performance or staging of her own subjectivity. In fact, one might say that the three elements are highlighted and condensed in *El pájaro de la felicidad* and that they are textually embodied in the three (m)otherly strategies presented in the film. Carmen will embody her own abjected otherness when she is reduced to a debased sexual object by her attackers; she will also perform her (m)otherly non-serviam to the socially sanctioned maternal role, and she will emerge as a new sexual being precisely while performing the most traditional motherly role: that of the healer. Miró conflates her mimetic irony with her deepest emotions in a textual confession that is framed by Murillo's representation of the embrace between Mary and Elizabeth. If, as Carmen tells Nani, Murillo was showing an optimistic view of life in portraying that embrace, Miró seems to endow it also with a secret force. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the sequence of Carmen's and Nani's own embrace has been perceived as Miró's highest artistic achievement:

> The most remarkable aspect, anyway, is the parallelism between the restoration of a painting that portrays two women and the evolution in the relationship between the protagonist and her

> daughter-in-law, where the exemplary synchrony between José Luis Alcaine's remarkable cinematography with Jordi Savall's score and Mercedes Sampietro's and Aitana Sánchez-Gijón's performances give the film—and Pilar Miró's career—their most inspired moments. (Guarner 30)

The profound sense of culmination that emerges from Carmen's and Nani's embrace comes not only from the perfect combination of acting, mise-en-scène, and musical background. It also comes from its sustained mise-en-abîme effect. It telescopes the initial impossible contact between Nani and Carmen, who could not hold her grandson in her arms, and it does so by replicating the camera work, that constant framing of silhouettes by windows and doors, and by offering a series of close-ups that amount to a visual caress, an expression of touch that is analogous to the loving touch required to restore the inner life of the painting. It also culminates in the "still life" metaphor that had been highlighted in the segment of Carmen's return to her parents' house in Ripoll, and, especially, to the sequence of the conversation between father and daughter in the attic, with the apples drenched in sunlight. It was in that moment, precisely, that Carmen learned of Emili's "betrayal," the idealized lover from her youth who had married another woman and lived with her abroad, where he has now died. The parental pious lie is put to rest now by Carmen's father, whose confession releases Carmen's consciousness from her spectral fixation. The tenderness of the father-daughter rapport, moreover, is yet another expression of Miró's own inner reconciliation. A "separate peace" that allows her to move away from the imposition of silence and the additional strictures of the Spanish Oedipal narrative.[8] Carmen's father, as played by Jordi Torras, becomes the first positive father figure to actually occupy a diegetic space in Miró's fiction, which had seen the remote patriarchal aristocrat played by Eduardo Blanco in *La petición*, the manipulative authority figures of judge Isasa, played by Héctor Alterio, and the local *cacique,* played by Fernando Rey in *El crimen de Cuenca*; the absent-present father idealized in the face of Gary Cooper in *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos*; the figure of Víctor, the ambitious engineer who rejects not only his son's homosexuality but any fatherly commitment in *Hablamos esta noche;* the cold and domineering figure of Alberto, the father of Germanic descent interpreted by Féodor Atkine in *Werther*; and the sinister authority figure of Ugarte/Valdivia, the heart of the political darkness described in *Beltenebros*. Such a negative gallery of spectral father figures has, as Miró herself declared, both a personal and a generational origin:

> My father used to repeat the sentence I hate the most: "In the army one obeys and does not question." It is a topic that should

> be treated in cinema. There are many films about the [Spanish] civil war. And yet, this kind of story has not been told despite how common it was to live such a dark childhood during the postwar years. We were afraid of everything, of sin, of punishment and the pain of divided families. And then there was the silence. We have known only silence. (Miró in Carrión, Ignacio 21)

The generational silence imposed by Francoism was rendered a private imposition by the taciturn, axiomatic, and bitter figure of Miró's own father, a Republican military officer who was demoted by Franco in the postwar period. With the dialogue between Carmen and her father in the luminous attic of Ripoll, Miró is exorcising her inner ghosts while offering an ideal version of the necessary dialogue between "the two Spains." Despite not being able to live again in her parents' house, it will be Carmen's loving remembrance of her past "still life" that enables her to get in touch with herself. Thus, in contrast to the quick superposition of establishing shots that mark Carmen's arrival, Miró's camera work will accentuate its visual caresses in a series of extended panning shots of objects related to Carmen's past. For the first time, the close-ups of Carmen's hands and fingers will neither relate to her failed motherhood nor to her professional care of damaged paintings but to her own self-expression. While in Ripoll, the only shot of Carmen's back, moreover, shows her happily in a swing. It is interesting, in this respect, to recall here Miró's most debated close-ups: the ones she used to portray the physical torture of Gregorio Valero (Daniel Dicenta) and José Manuel Cervino (León Sánchez), the two friends falsely accused in *El crimen de Cuenca*.[9] The extreme close-ups of their tortured members, and especially their fingers, replicate the earlier close-ups of Judge Isasa's impolute hands and cane and those of the boots of the *cacique* Contreras. In so doing, Miró was not only illustrating her own personal and feminist change of weapons but was also exercising her right to memory in a dramatic (Foucauldian) rendering of the paradoxical gesture to dismember in order to remember. Such a gesture is now duplicated in an intimate fashion: Carmen's remembrance has also been preceded by her social and physical dismemberment. With the caressing close-ups of *El pájaro de la felicidad*, Miró is textualizing her own (m)otherly inscription, the new agency of a person who chooses the terms of her desire both as a mother and as a woman. The freedom of Carmen's choice does indeed reflect Miró's own option to be a devoted single mother who permanently rejected the symbolic law of the father's name:

> One of her biggest challenges, successfully solved as with most of the things she tried to do, was to become a mother. Her doctors

> advised her to undergo surgery before trying to endure pregnancy. In the mid-seventies Pilar Miró did undergo [surgery], and a few years later, when she was already forty and was immersed in a never ending process to start shooting *El crimen de Cuenca*, she decided to run the risk. She became pregnant and gave birth to Gonzalo, on February 13, 1981. She will register the baby using her last two surnames: Miró Romero. The first woman producer to work in Televisión Española (Spanish Television) never revealed her baby's father's identity. Protected by the discretion that had always surrounded her private life, Pilar Miró lived only for her son and fought against illness and adversity for him, but also supported by him. (De Montini 75)

The final shots of *El pájaro de la felicidad,* with Carmen holding her grandson and followed by the little puppy that Fernando, her ex-husband, a doctor-turned-veterinarian, has sent her as an ironic gift given her proclaimed dislike for dogs, is yet another emblem of that (m)otherly choice. Counterpointed with the aria from Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, it emblematizes neither the patriarchal logic of sacrifice in sanctioned motherly roles nor the tragic *Liebestod* implied in the operatic figure of legendary proportions but that ultimate "separate peace": the assumption of motherhood of one's own accord, beyond the strictures not only of the Spanish Oedipal family but of any family, *tout court*. And yet Miró's loving tale of freedom and reconciliation is not entirely free from familial tensions and contradictions. And central among those is, precisely, her portrayal of Carmen's return home and the role it plays in Miró's own rendition of the family metaphor as national allegory. Carmen's return home is presented as a crucial step in her personal healing process and in the metaphorical one of Spain's entire body politic. True to this subtext, it is at home that Carmen will be confronted by her mother in a verbal clash that reads like a direct political statement. Here is the transcription of that mother-daughter plot:

> There one can no longer live and soon enough, believe it or not, even here a decent person won't be able to live in peace. Everything one reads and hears, all the things that those ugly people who run the country have to say. This country is an accepted and confessed hell. She is an example of it. Why has she come otherwise? After all these years there, she, who supported all those who brought us this crazy way of governing the country, now has to find a refuge here, among her friends. Those whom I supported started doing a good job, mother. It wasn't enough to get rid of the dictatorship. I haven't come fleeing from anybody, and even

> less from politics, but it is true that I am looking for something to hang on in order to keep going. Something that is neither a utopia nor false promises. (Miró, *El pájaro de la felicidad*)

This exchange is presented with a simple shot/countershot between Carmen and her mother and brief intervals with a middle close-up of the father's brief interventions, like his "calla ja, prou de bestieses!" ("Stop it. Enough nonsense!"). Until the mother leaves the room, which is celebrated by an immediate sense of complicity between father and daughter and by a transition to Catalan dialogue. The obvious negative allusion to the current government, "esa gentuza que dirige el país," is a clear reference to the PSOE and the series of scandals that had smeared its political work. Miró's choice to represent Carmen's family as constituted by a belligerant neo-Francoist mother and a skeptical landowner might be a plausible representation. However, the fact of presenting a monolingual Castilian mother in the context of Ripoll, the heart of rural Catalonia, is in itself quite improbable and it becomes almost as much of a superimposition as the series of establishing shots that makes us believe that Besalú—the actual shooting location of the film—is actually Ripoll. Thus, the need to portray a Francoist background for Carmen prevails over the accurate representation of otherness within Spain. Catalan and Spanish are assumed to be in equal standing even in such an emblematic place as Ripoll. Thus, despite her clear outcry in the name of a necessary dialogue between Spain's internal others, Miró's linguistic contradiction dissolves Catalonia's true difference. Technically, however, this is visually rendered in the film's most beautiful dissolve, the one that merges the green and fading light of the Catalan Pyrenees with the spectacular sunrise over the bluest of waters on the coast of Almeria, where Carmen will find her true refuge. It is important to recall that that beautiful dissolve comes at the end of the previously mentioned paternal confession of Emili's (Carmen's idealized love of her youth) death. And that it is framed by the back of Carmen's body while she is approaching the small window in the attic. In feminist terms, this is an extraordinary subversion of the traditional "woman in the attic" motif. Carmen has gotten rid of her idealized past. She can finally turn her back to it. She is no longer trapped by any of the (male) attics (and antics) of her desire. Cinematically, this sequence creates a true "still life" that literally becomes alive thanks to that remarkable dissolve: the slow fade out to black followed by a fade into the gorgeous lights of the sunrise over the Mediterranean. At the height of her aesthetic talent, with that dissolve that merges North and South, Catalonia and Andalusia, Miró seems to occupy still the position of a nostalgic subjectivity very akin to that of the writers of the Genera-

tion of '98, which she evokes in her film. And I find this to be a rather paradoxical position in a film whose major raison d'être was precisely that of articulating her protest against what Alberto Medina calls: "The meticulous drama of national reconciliation and the historical pact of memory's desertion" (Medina 61).

Betrayed by her own dream of personal reconciliation, by her own "pacte autobiographique," Miró may have reinforced a part of that collective amnesia she wanted to difuse. Carmen's rejection of the melancholic subject position, however, is made explicit in her remarks to her father: she would die of happy seclusion were she to stay amid the remnants of her past in Ripoll. Both in psychological and in narrative terms, Carmen makes the right move. The presence of the Catalan language and of the Catalan scenery, on the other hand, remain in the film's diegesis as a gesture that still amounts to a political statement, albeit a compromised one.

Conclusion: *El pájaro de la felicidad* as Pilar Miró's Painterly "Stabat Mater"

> Although one could call *El sol del membrillo* (*The Quince Tree Sun*, 1992) an "art documentary," . . . I think it is more productive to discuss it in the context of an international subgenre of documentary that transgresses the borders with fiction—in this case meditative films on representation that negotiate the blurred boundaries between art and popular culture, modernism and postmodernism. [. . .] All of these films are by international auteurs whose works now (at the time of this production) seem more peripheral in a world cinema dominated by Hollywood action films and megamarketing. As Godard says in *JLG by JLG*, "Europe has memories, America has T-shirts!" These auteurs all refer reflexively to their own earlier films, either through direct allusions or allusive intertextual imagery. In reaffirming the exceptional value of art, they all make prominent reference to painting (Antonio López and Michelangelo in the case of Erice, Cézanne in the case of Antonioni, Rubens in the case of Godard), developing an analogy between the visual art forms of film and painting which are contrasted with television and video. They all focus on the specificity of their own familiar landscapes (Erice's Madrid, Antonioni's Ferrara, and Godard's native Switzerland), presenting them as a means of reasserting the unique value of their own localized identity, particularly against the onslaught

> of a postmodern global culture dominated by American mass media. (Kinder, *Refiguring Spain* 88)

This is exactly the historical and aesthetic context that informs Miró's most "meditative" and certainly most "painterly" film: *El pájaro de la felicidad*. As Marsha Kinder suggests, it also provides Miró with a strong model for that *cinéma d'auteur* that had characterized both Godard's *nouvelle vague* and Antonioni's worldly iconoclasm. Elsewhere,[10] I have analyzed some of the film's central intertextual components and the narrative role of Jordi Savall's excellent musical score, which built on the formula he had so successfully created for Alain Courneau's *Tous les matins du monde* (*All the Mornings of the World*, 1991), a film that takes the "painterly" analogy to an expressive extreme and whose nostalgic retrospection becomes yet another model for Miró's own. What I want to point out here is the intratextuality in *El pájaro de la felicidad*, the series of visual allusions to Miró's previous work that reinforce both her conscious decision to align her discourse with the *cinéma d'auteur* tradition, and her productive self-exploration, her cooption of fetishism and narcissism, two of Freud's favorite symptoms in his approach to female subjectivity. Beyond the obvious coincidences in the plot line of Miró's "meditative films," I would like to discuss briefly a couple of especially significant allusions. The first one comes at the very end of *El pájaro de la felicidad* when we see Carmen Figueres with her grandson Andrés in her arms and followed by the little puppy that her ex-husband Enrique has just sent her as a present. They are standing on a dusty piece of land by the long house full of arches that is perched over the small village by the coast of Almeria. Savall's baroque musical score has been now replaced by Dido's aria from Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. In one of the film's few panoramic shots, the camera follows the contours of the sharp canyon leading to that opening over the blue ocean, where we find the figure of Carmen advancing while her voice-over tells us: "To miss the future, which does not exist, is to accept life deprived of its better days, and to live is like having lived already; having lived not meaning, unfortunately, to be already dead." This beautiful rendering of the "death-in-life" motif culminates in Carmen's migrant subject position. Together with her impossible return home, it reads as an epitaph to her ideal of a nation. Or, as Homi Bhabha puts it, following Benedict Anderson's formulation: "It articulates the death-in-life of the idea of the 'imagined community' of the nation" (*Nation and Narration* 315). And yet, if we recall Doris Sommer's analysis of Anderson's famous formulation, Carmen's symbolic position, her joyous "sacrifice of love," may be

interpreted as the remnant of the "mystical inflection" that created the imagined community in the first place (Sommer 37). Be that as it may, the final sequence of *El pájaro de la felicidad* becomes a clear allusion to the dramatic "pietà" presented in *El crimen de Cuenca*, which I mentioned before. Unlike La Varona's forced betrayal, Carmen's voice-over is uttered as a celebration of her renewed maternal role, and it marks not only her vulnerability but her fullness as a subject as well. It culminates, as it were, in Carmen's process of restorative embodiment. This leads me to the second intratextual allusion, which directly links *El pájaro de la felicidad* with *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos*. I am referring precisely to Miró's use of disembodied voice-overs, an important feminist technique studied by Kaja Silverman, whose work "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice" is retaken by Isolina Ballesteros and Susan Martín-Márquez in their analyses of Miró's cinema (Ballesteros 44). Besides Carmen's final voice-over, the same technique is privileged in another crucial "literary" moment in *El pájaro de la felicidad*. It is precisely the sequence that portrays Nani's and Carmen's attraction. After the healing contact of their arms and the caressing seduction of Murillo's painting, we see Nani duplicating Carmen's gesture of reading from Angel González's volume *Palabra sobre palabra*. We had heard Carmen's almost religious reading of González's lyrics by the fire at her parents' home in Ripoll. Here, we see Nani, in a similar ecstatic gesture, reading from the same book. The voice that we hear is not Nani's but Carmen's while the camera caresses Nani's face. Here the erotic and romantic tension is not diminished by that voice-over, as was the case with Andrea Soriano, according to Isolina Ballesteros' analysis. What undercuts that romantic tension is the dramatic irony of the text being read: "Loneliness is like a lamplight adroitly stoned. I am supported by it" (180). Thus, while the image is performing the physical encounter between the two women, the text/voice-over reminds Nani and the viewers about Carmen's only existential certainty: her loneliness. The double articulation of desire and loss, of embodiment and disembodiment, of fullness and vulnerability is thus achieved in another remarkable "still life." That sequence also illustrates Pilar Miró's recourse to a productive self-referentiality, to her transgressive use of fetishism and narcissism. As pointed out by Isolina Ballesteros:

> A mimesis happens. Or, rather, an inversion of the fetishization process through which the protagonist substitutes the lost and dreamed objects of her desire (father, lover, cinematic idol) for the objects that belonged to them, the texts that they wrote or the images that represent them. (38)

In this sense, Angel González's words become another example of disembodiment, this time not only personal but generational, since they not only speak the voice of the political and poetic exile—ironically included to the point of caricature in the figure of Ricardo Elorza (José Sacristán), the professor who teaches the "spirit" of the Generation of '98 to American students; they also stand in for the loss of a (Spanish) poetic subject.[11] Indeed, with *El pájaro de la felicidad*, Miró's "(m)otherly strategy" is clearly aimed at becoming a symbolic resistance "against the onslaught of a postmodern global culture" dominated by Hollywood. And, to remain at the level of those "familiar landscapes," Miró's film is also, perhaps even specially, aimed at resisting the persistence of what Marsha Kinder herself has termed "the Spanish Oedipal narrative."

Interestingly enough, Kinder's previously quoted passage comes from her analysis of Víctor Erice's *El sol del membrillo*, the film that culminates in Erice's painterly style and also his reliance on the privileged position of the gaze in the cinematic apparatus. At the core of Miró's film there is, indeed, the same "mythical impulse to conquer time": "In the press kit Erice describes the film as follows: 'It consists, in essence, of capturing a real event: the drawing and the painting of a tree . . .' " Thus the film is about representation, or, (in Erice's terms) "the secret relationship between painting and cinema" and their shared dream of

> the perfect capturing of light . . . [which] obeys—as André Bazin so rightly pointed out—the same mythical impulse; the ingrained need to conquer time through the perpetuity of forms; the desire to replace the external world with its double. [. . .] Yet within Erice's film that mastery is denied to the community of artists performing on screen, who are never seen completing their work. . . . Although Erice's film *is* presumably finished, he and his crew are never visible on screen; we see only still lives of his photographic equipment, hardly an image of mastery. (Kinder, *Refiguring Spain* 88–89)

Turning Kinder's last sentence inside out, one might say that both Erice and Miró are seduced by the mastery of the "still life," by its capacity to "replace the external world with its double." Both directors share also a deep knowledge of the impossibility of their secret dream. The doubling effect of art and representation does not conquer time or change an injury. At its best, art becomes a marker or an emblem of historical change through its paradoxical power of fixing a moment in time. It is of this power that Carmen speaks when she tells Nani that Murillo wanted to present a positive side of life, that is, the possibility

of healing and contact, of deep tenderness among human beings. In a cinematic world like that of Miró, full of sharp angles, violent close-ups and impossible communication among characters, the healing embrace between Carmen and Nani appears as a true replacement of the external world by an idealized (self)-representation. That culminating scene when Carmen's fingers are shown in an extreme close-up caressing Nani's face and body reads precisely as an opposite double to all the dramatically violent close-ups in Miró's cinematography. The fact that they duplicate Nani's own caressing strokes over Murillo's restored faces of Mary and Elizabeth bespeak yet another dream, perhaps another impossibility, that of the maternal reconciliation—a dream of reconciliation, as mentioned throughout this chapter, that has been the leading impulse in Miró's lyrical segment, from *Gary Cooper, que estás en los cielos* to *El pájaro de la felicidad*. Such a persistent dream is painterly inscribed in the central metaphor of Murillo's work: a familiar embrace between free women. Beyond the Freudian pale, so to speak, there emerges the possibility of representing—of dreaming of—a non-Oedipal family. And it is the possibility of this representation that ultimately sets Miró apart from her masterly model, Víctor Erice, and from some of the most important of the new Basque filmmakers, like Julio Medem and Juanma Bajo Ulloa, whose work shows a profound Ericean influence. Both Medem in *Vacas* (*Cows*, 1992) and Bajo Ulloa in *Alas de mariposa* (*Butterfly's Wings*, 1991) and *La madre muerta* (*The Dead Mother*, 1993) will use the painterly motif to emblematize the collusion of motherhood and maternity, thus reinforcing the Oedipal master narrative, whose historical violence these filmmakers are trying to denounce.[12] In her adept analysis of Bajo Ulloa's films, María Pilar Rodríguez indicates the importance of the use of close-ups and of framing/painterly devices, while stressing the director's (Ericean) reliance on the gaze.[13] Pilar Rodríguez also emphasizes the intensity of those close-ups and the fierce return of the gaze effected by Ami and Leire, the two extraordinary female protagonists of Bajo Ulloa's first two films. There is little mention, however, of the fact that both painterly devices are torn apart or boken—that is, of their becoming markers of the familiar strife. Or, in other words, of their continued inscription of a violent master narrative that the very name of *La madre muerta* epitomizes. Unlike these representations, Miró's rendition of the painterly motif goes beyond the fetishistic blockage of past memories. It performs the very healing of such traumatic memories.[14] The sexual aggression against Carmen, which textualizes Miró's own personal injury, is healed by the loving acceptance of her own (m)otherly desire, which is expressed at the same time by her curing Nani's injured arm and by her embracing and kissing her, in a homoerotic gesture that blends

physical and spiritual love and that effectively restores her own subjectivity and agency beyond any Oedipal rivalries. And yet, as clear proof of the impossibility of the "still life" dream, that external world will soon reappear to claim its power over any subjective fixation. It will be now Nani's turn to renounce a fixed maternal role in order to become both a productive subject and a desiring one. The final departure with her new boyfriend and Carmen's acceptance will offer a highly differentiated version of the melodramatic and tragic violence of the Spanish Oedipal narrative. Carmen's final assumption of her "stabat mater" is thus disengaged from the Christian/Freudian drama and offers itself as a model of inner reconciliation that is certainly new on the Spanish screens.

What is not new, however, is Miró's articulation of that "unique value of one's own localized identity," to return to Marsha Kinder's words. Or, to put it simply: Miró's dream of reconciliation, her "imagined community," still betrays "a familiar landscape." Despite her migrant condition and her impossible homecoming, Carmen will make a living by restoring the Spanish national patrimony. Thus, the Murillo painting is not only an emblem of historical change, of the vulnerability of art and the human body, but also, perhaps especially, an emblem of a historical filiation, "an acknowledgement of Spain's great cultural heritage" (Kinder, *Refiguring Spain* 91).[15] If Pilar Miró has rejected and/or altered the Oedipal adjective of Spain's traditional master narrative, she seemed to be fully at home inside the Spanish marker. From that perspective, her last professional undertaking as director of the televised broadcast of the royal wedding between princess Cristina de Borbón and Iñaki Urdangarín may be seen as her most accomplished moment. Shot in the streets of Barcelona, the union between a Basque sportsman and the youngest daughter of the reigning Bourbon family, who lives and works in the Catalan capital, became a dream come true. Barcelona was the new stage for an old Spanish romance: Catalonia was no longer a problematic "backyard" but the newfound center of Spain's postmodern national allegory. Building on the collective memory of the images of King Juan Carlos almost in tears waving at his son, Prince Felipe, as he marched with the Spanish flag during the inaugural ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games, Miró's unanimously praised broadcast brought that national romance of reconciliation back to the foreground of the Spanish imaginary. And yet, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, beyond this public display of an ideal family romance, the dramatic urgency of true dialogue between the different components of the Spanish body politic still remains. And, at the heart of that dialogue, the possibility of imagining a different romance, a different (post)national space.

Notes

1. See my essay "Towards a New Transcultural Dialogue in Spanish Film."

2. See, for instance, her essay "Diez años de cine español."

3. I am borrowing the phrase from the title of Marianne Hirsch's well-known volume: *The Mother/Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychonalysis, Feminism*, one of the first studies that shifted the Freudian Oedipal focus in order to represent the (m)otherly variations of the family romance. As Hirsch has it: "This book foregrounds the 'other woman,' the mother, in relation to the 'other child,' the daughter" (2).

4. With the parenthetical (new) I am implying that Miró is also very aware of the historical (and colonial) links with Italy and Europe. Thus, unlike Francoism's traditional transatlantic imperial gaze, Spain's entrance into the European Union has brought back another set of historical and cultural links. Since the Italian Renaissance, these links are intertextually inscribed in Spain's artistic patrimony, in that very painting tradition that Carmen professionally restores.

5. See my essay "La piedad profana de Pilar Miró," where I elaborate on the director's transgressive treatment of the traditional Christian (and patriarchal) "pietà."

6. Most importantly, it is the violent ideological superstructure that gets both inscribed and denounced in those two initial films. The difficulties of masquerading/representing violence in both films also explain their "scandalous" receptions, which, in the case of *El crimen de Cuenca,* bypassed the theatrical boundaries to become a political test of the newborn democracy in Spain. For detailed explanations of the events surrounding this political scandal and the general impact of Miró's films during the transition years, see Juan Pérez Millán's volume: *Pilar Miró, directora de cine* (especially 148–54), and María del Carmen Méndez's "Un cine para la transición: Las películas de Pilar Miró entre 1976 y 1982."

7. Catherine Davies borrows the term from Donna Stanton. All my references to Davies's work come from my notes during her lectures on "Autobiografía y literatura femenina," which formed part of the Girona University Summer School of 1996.

8. I am referring to Marsha Kinder's formulation of such a "master narrative" within Spain's filmography in her *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain.*

9. It is important to recall that even in this film, where Miró's masquerade of the male gaze is at its peak, we can find a clear inscription of her (m)otherly strategies—namely, her impressive creation of a transgressive "pietà" as an emblem of physical aggression. I am referring to the poignant sequence where we see Gregorio (Daniel Dicenta) grabbing his son from La Varona's (Amparo Soler Leal) breast and drinking her milk. Besides constituting Miró's private homage to John Ford and his unforgettable *The Grapes of Wrath*, this scene offers a climactic condensation of her reduction to being a "monstruous mother." Victimized twice by her husband and by the powers that be, La Varona is forced to falsely incriminate Gregorio, her husband. The voice-over of her incriminating declaration is heard while we see her descending a dusty path, followed by a dog and holding her son, who is crying in her arms. Miró foregrounds this moment by shooting it in one of the film's rare middle long shots, which sharply contrast with the already mentioned "in-your-face" close-ups that make most of the film.

10. See my essay "Regendering Spain's Political Bodies," 221–23.

11. Miró's parodic homage is intensified by the fact that Angel González has indeed played the part in his real life of professor of Spanish literature in the United States.

12. I consider that collusion an ideological limitation in the work of these two otherwise innovative Basque filmmakers. See my essay "(M)Otherly Monsters: Old Misogyny and/in New Basque Cinema."

13. See María Pilar Rodríguez's *Mundos en conflicto: Aproximaciones al cine vasco de los noventa* (especially 123–24).

14. In this sense, her maternal representation stands as a symbolic opposition to those maternal metaphors described by Carlos Saura, whose "possession" of the children's imaginary foreclosed any real memories, as Alberto Medina's analysis of *Mamá cumple cien años* (*Mama Turns 100*, 1979) clearly shows.

15. Such an acknowledgment and the same gesture of national restoration will be the engine behind her final film: *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*, 1996), which restores Spain's Golden Age theatre by giving it new (cinematic) life.

9

Abjection, Trauma, and the Material Image

La madre muerta

(Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1993)

Jo Labanyi

La madre muerta (*The Dead Mother*, 1993) is a film that invites and frustrates psychoanalytic explanation. Psychoanalysis has been central to the discipline of film studies since its professionalization in the 1970s, and especially to feminist film criticism, which since 1975 has dominated the field. But its centrality has also been challenged, most notably by Steven Shaviro, who has argued for a material reading of the medium. In this chapter, I propose to take Bajo Ulloa's film as a test case for discussing the relative merits of psychoanalytic and material readings. To do so, I shall read it alternately through Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body*, both of which discuss abjection from a psychoanalytic and anti-psychoanalytic standpoint, respectively. I shall supplement my discussion of abjection with brief reference to writing on trauma.

The hesitation as to whether to read the film psychoanalytically or in material terms derives from the film's refusal to tell us whether the cause of the muteness of the film's protagonist, Leire, is psychological or physical. She is shown to suffer throughout the film from traumatic reenactments, triggered by the sight of blood, of the moment when, as a young child, she witnessed the murder of her mother by an intruder, Ismael. This encourages us to suppose that her inability to speak is the

Matar es tan fácil como robar un dulce a un niño,
...pero menos peligroso.
LA MADRE MUERTA
GASTEIZKO ZINEMA presenta un film de JUANMA BAJO ULLOA
KARRA ELEJALDE • ANA ALVAREZ • LIO • SILVIA MARSO
Escrita por JUANMA Y EDUARDO BAJO ULLOA. Decorador: SATUR IDARRETA. Montaje: PABLO BLANCO.
Música: BINGEN MENDIZABAL. Fotografía: JAVIER AGUIRRESAROBE. Productor Ejecutivo: FERNANDO BAULUZ
Ministerio de Cultura
Diputación de Alava
Escarlata Films S.A.

Fig. 9. The poster for *La madre muerta*.
Courtesy of Sogepaq and Filmoteca Española.

result of psychological damage. The fact that she whimpers at the sight of blood shows that she can utter sounds. But we also see Ismael put his shotgun to the little Leire's head when she confronts him with her accusing gaze as, after shooting her mother, he takes her half-eaten bar of chocolate, left in the kitchen (more about chocolate later). This moment is followed by a blinding flash, which we provisionally assume is a gunshot—an assumption confirmed toward the end of the film when Ismael parts the now teenage Leire's hair to reveal the scar from the bullet wound. The dialogue never reveals the extent of the brain damage, if any, done to Leire by this gunshot, but it is clear from the positioning of the gun and the scar that the bullet must have entered her brain. It

is never clarified whether Leire understands language but is just unable to speak, or whether she has no access to language at all. Indeed, it is not clear whether she has any kind of subjectivity. A noticeable feature of the film is its presentation of Leire as object of the gaze, with only a minimal number of shots taken from her point of view—all of these intercut, through the use of shot/reverse shot, with glimpses of her blank stare. Thus these point-of-view shots tell us nothing about Leire's response to what she sees. The fascination of Leire for us and for Ismael is that we are uncertain whether she is a person—able to generate meaning from within—or a body—that is, a blank surface onto which others attempt to project meaning but which resists that attempt.

Shaviro, discussing Warhol's films, talks of the "primordial *stupidity* of the body, a weird inertness and passivity, something that freely offers itself to all the categories of thought and representation, allows them to invest it and pass through it, yet somehow always effortlessly evades them" (208). Shaviro similarly highlights the evacuation of subjectivity incarnated in the zombie, since they are "all body" with "brains but not minds" (86). He insists that this "abject vacancy" and "passive emptying of the self" (98) produces not only horror in the spectator, but also fascination. This is a "disidentification" rather than an identification, since it consists of a sympathetic attraction to the evacuation of subjectivity:

> But such vacuity is not nothingness, for it is powerfully, physically felt . . . The hardest thing to acknowledge is that the living dead are not radically Other so much as they serve to awaken a passion for otherness and for vertiginous disidentification that is already latent within our own selves. (99)

Leire is a kind of zombie in that she has "come back from the dead," apparently brainless, after being shot by Ismael as a child. But, unlike the classic zombie, she is beautiful, increasing the attraction to her evacuation of subjectivity in a particularly disturbing way.

If we read Leire through Shaviro's analysis of the zombie movie and of Warhol's attempt to evacuate meaning by reducing bodies to an impenetrable surface, she becomes an emblem of the material image that invites but refuses meaning. Thus she asserts her materiality over any attempt by the spectator to draw it into the symbolic order of language. The key point made by Shaviro in this respect is that such vacuous material images, in resisting spectators' attempts to invest them with meaning, do not distance spectators but allow them to open themselves up to engulfment by what Sartre disparagingly called "the practico-inert"

(Shaviro 202): that is, to enjoyment of the annulment of their subjectivity. In other words, the "stupid body," which fascinates and attracts us, allows us to give ourselves up to a state of abjection: invasion of the self by an alien materiality.

Shaviro only once mentions Kristeva's classic study of abjection, *Powers of Horror*, to note that, although its force lies in her analysis of the *jouissance* afforded by giving oneself up to abjection, nonetheless she sees the abject as something that needs to be resisted in order to construct the ego (Shaviro 260). In other words, Kristeva is still operating from within a psychoanalytic concept of the self as a defensive process of boundary formation and policing, necessary to protect the self from engulfment by the Other and from the formlessness that results from any breaching of the self-Other boundary. Her book celebrates the ways in which certain writers have revelled in the abject, abandoning defensive ego-formations, but she nevertheless posits language as their means of conquering the threat of the abject in the process of immersing themselves in it.

Kristeva's discussion is gendered since she assumes that the abject is incarnated in the maternal body, fusion with which produces *jouissance* but also terror of loss of self; and that language is the means of transcending it since language is (to use Lacan's term) the "Law of the Father" (a curious concept given that, as the phrase "mother tongue" indicates, language is usually learnt from the mother). Kristeva argues that only male writers explore the terror of the abject, since only they succeed in fully separating from the mother and constructing ego boundaries, through their incorporation into the "Law of the Father." Only they can appreciate the terrors of the abject since only they have something to lose—unlike women, who occupy the position of the abject anyway. Like Freud and Lacan, Kristeva assumes that the mother stands for the body, and the father for the symbolic order of language, access to which necessarily involves separation from "the real." In other words, the symbolic order is constituted by lack. If Freud saw the Oedipus complex in terms of the lack produced by the horror of the mother's "castrated" body and by the threat of castration by the father for desiring the mother's body, Lacan will recast the psychoanalytic notion of lack in terms of the loss of the real produced by the passage from the pre-Oedipal identification with the mother's body to the symbolic order represented by access to language. Kristeva's relation to the Freudian and Lacanian Oedipal scenario is complex, since, although she accepts the inevitability of the passage from the pre-Oedipal to the Oedipal, she also attaches a positive value to the pre-Oedipal mother-child bond (Moi 137–213). If Freud saw emergence from the pre-Oedipal scenario as necessary to avoid engulfment by the mother, Kristeva will celebrate the primary mother-daughter bond as a fullness inevitably but tragically lost on access to the symbolic order

based on lack. In celebrating male writers who have been able to open themselves to the abject, she is celebrating their ability to face the dissolution of the self implied by the primary bond with the mother—that is, male writers who have been able to face the "horror" of immersion in the maternal body (*Powers of Horror* 16–18).

Kristeva insists that abjection—the construction of boundaries through the expulsion of what is perceived as abject—is necessary to culture (*Powers of Horror* 2). She takes her analysis of the foundation of culture through abjection from the anthropological work of Mary Douglas. Kristeva's originality lies in her rereading of Douglas's anthropological analysis of the role of material culture in the formation of collective symbolic systems, through a psychoanalytic exploration of the role of abjection in cultural formation, seen in terms of individual ego formation. This leads her to associate the polluted substances analyzed by Douglas—all of which exit or enter the body, breaching body boundaries—with the maternal or fertilizable body: menstrual blood, milk, and excrement (which comes to be perceived as abject through the toilet training imparted by the mother).

La madre muerta invites a psychoanalytic reading because of its opening scene, before the credits, showing us Leire's violent separation from the mother. The violence of this scene is made more shocking by the initial close-up of the beautiful photograph of the infant Leire in her Madonna-like mother's arms, followed by a slow zoom out and pan of the statues and paintings, mostly of the Madonna, in her mother's art restorer's studio—set to the overwhelmingly beautiful strains of the theme song. The camera halts—as the violins hit a jarring note—on a painting of the Madonna and Child severed from each other by a diagonal rip in the canvas at the level of the mother's neck. This image was used on the poster for the film, which placed a metal collar and chain around the Child's neck, prefiguring the collar and chain that Ismael will later use to imprison the teenage Leire as his kidnap victim. All of these Madonna images, including the photograph of Leire in her mother's arms, are filmed in flashes of colour, punctuating the blue-tinged dark interior as the intruding Ismael's torch falls on them. This appears to "reanimate" the images—an impression violently shattered by the ensuing shooting of Leire's mother and, subsequently, Leire herself. Both of these shootings are filmed in blue-tinged monochrome, with one important exception: the blood that we see trickle over Leire's mother's point-of-view shot as, dying on the ground, she sees the feet of little Leire approach, cutting to an all-red screen as her vision is blotted out.

But although this violent prologue invites a psychoanalytic reading, given that psychoanalysis posits the separation from the mother as the founding moment of ego formation, it is hard to make such a reading

work. In the Freudian and Lacanian accounts, it is the father who severs the mother-child bond. Are we then to see Ismael as the "Law of the Father"? Leire's actual father is neither seen nor mentioned in the film. The equation of Ismael with the father who separates the daughter from the mother provides an explanation of Leire's curious attraction and self-subordination to him when he kidnaps her years later. But such a reading posits an extraordinarily degraded image of the father, since Ismael is a brutal criminal. Should we read this as a critique of the violence involved in the subordination of the ego—especially the female ego—to the "Law of the Father"? Such a reading is possible, given the strong critique of patriarchy in Bajo Ulloa's first film, *Alas de mariposa* (1991), which describes a daughter's repudiation for not being a boy, her killing of her younger brother and consequent estrangement from her mother, and her later enforced impregnation through rape. Ismael does in some ways come to occupy the position of father to Leire—twice saving her from the oncoming train under which he vainly attempts to throw her—but this is a murderous father. Susan Martín-Márquez argues that Ismael takes on the role of mother to Leire, attempting to instill in her a notion of what Kristeva calls the "clean and proper body" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 72), by chiding her for eating the bar of chocolate she has dropped in the mud, and subsequently nourishing her with repeated offers of chocolate. But Ismael also seems to live in a state of infantile narcissism, having no super-ego but expecting immediate satisfaction of his desires, and killing or threatening to kill anyone who gets in the way of them (the drug-dealer, Maite)—apart from Leire who instills in him a strange respect because she alone makes no demands on him. The inability to locate Ismael firmly in any one position in the Oedipal triad (father, mother, infant) is compounded by the fact that we have absolutely no information about his past history.

Even more problematic is Leire's relation to the Oedipal scenario. For, in her case, separation from the mother, far from allowing ego-formation and access to the symbolic order of language, leads to total autism and an inability to speak. The fact that we first see Leire through her dying mother's bloodstained point-of-view shot invites the suggestion that Leire remains trapped in the mother's viewpoint for ever. This is tantamount to saying that she remains forever trapped within a wounded maternal vision, her development arrested at the point of the traumatic event. According to such a reading, Leire is damaged not by violent separation from the mother, but by being permanently locked, through an act of violence, in the pre-Oedipal realm of indifferentiation, prior to language. If, on the one hand, we read Leire's violent separation from her mother as an entry into the Oedipal, then this is an Oedipal crisis that cannot be resolved

for lack of a father (other than Ismael as murderous father substitute). If, on the other hand, we read this violent separation as locking Leire in the pre-Oedipal, then this is a pre-Oedipal scenario of indifferentiation from the mother, but without the mother. These complications do not necessarily imply that we should abandon a psychoanalytic reading, for it could be argued that the lack of fit between Leire's situation and those of the psychoanalytic Oedipal paradigm is precisely the source of her psychic and physical disturbance.

Psychoanalysis has played a major if problematic role in modern Western culture by attributing physical impairment to psychic factors (as in Freud's reading of hysteria, which led him to "discover" the existence of the unconscious). This gives supremacy to the individual psyche, at the expense of underestimating the role of the material in psychological life. Freud's major breakthrough was his reading of hysteria as a response to a traumatic experience, relegated to the unconscious, and manifesting itself in physical symptoms whose psychic origin had been repressed. As is well known, Freud took further this dematerialization of trauma by rejecting his female patients' claims to have been physically abused by their fathers, interpreting this as a fantasy projection. Freud's discussion of war neurosis, after World War I, forced him to admit that trauma can have a material cause, but nevertheless he argued that the psychic trauma diminishes when there is material mutilation (301–05).

Certain writers on trauma have qualified Freud's interpretation of it as a largely, if not entirely, psychic phenomenon. Van Alphen argues that the traumatic event is not repressed, and that there is strictly no such thing as traumatic memory, for the traumatic event was never experienced in the first place. What Van Alphen means by this is that the traumatic event happened to the individual, but could not be registered as an "experience" because it did not fit the categories of possibility of that individual's culture. For example, the atrocities of the Holocaust could not be registered as "experiences" since they totally denied our modern Western assumption that the individual is defined by his or her ability to exercise free will. This makes it impossible to "experience" a situation in which the possibility of exercising free will does not arise, for in such circumstances one is not an individual but a thing: that is, a body. Van Alphen notes how many trauma victims talk of having died at the moment of the traumatic event. Trauma thus registers on the body rather than on the mind. Susan Brison has similarly argued that the compulsive reliving of the traumatic event is not so much the return of a repressed memory as a bodily possession by, and reenactment of, the past. Although Van Alphen and Brison argue that trauma is written on the body—including on vision—rather than on the mind, they both

suppose that the trauma can be overcome only by reconstructing an ego whose boundaries are strong enough to incorporate the traumatic event into it as an "experience." They do not ultimately challenge the modern Western notion of the free individual, which their theorization of trauma shows to be inadequate in certain situations.

Van Alphen's and Brison's discussions of trauma seem appropriate in Leire's case, for her traumatization consists in her reduction to a thing or body. She does not have flashes of memory of the traumatic event, but it returns to "possess" her physically at the sight of blood. The trauma thus seems to be written on her body and not on her psyche, for she is a body without any perceptible interiority. She has vision, but her gaze registers events blankly. Her responses are purely physical, with no sign of comprehension: when Maite, bathing her, tells her she is pretty, she plays with the soap suds; when Ismael tries to make her laugh with his clown song, she moves her head to the rhythm but her expression is vacant. She responds physically when Ismael touches her breast, when he masturbates her, and especially when he offers her chocolate—but in each case her gaze remains expressionless. Each time she is offered a chance of freedom, she retreats back to the corner where she had been chained by Ismael, implying that she has no sense of herself as a modern Western individual, defined by free will. Leire's "thingness" is illustrated strikingly the second time Ismael tries to push her under a train: when she falls after he hits her for whimpering, she gets up not to run away but to move zombie-like towards the approaching train. It is on occasions like this, when Leire responds as a "thing," that Ismael shows her tenderness. He may be infuriated by her refusal to offer him any kind of recognition, but he is able to respond to her because, as a "thing," she makes no demands on him. This contrasts with his abusive treatment of all the other people he encounters, who he reduces to the status of "things" to protect his seemingly fragile ego boundaries against their demands.

Ismael's obsession with Leire takes the form of gazing at her for hours on end. Maite insists that Leire is not the inert object of the gaze, but is controlling Ismael to get her revenge for the film's inaugural act of violence. Whether Leire recognizes Ismael as her mother's killer and her own assailant is never clear; it is Ismael who insists that she does and that she must be eliminated because she could denounce him. In practice, it is not Ismael who triggers memories of his murder of her mother in Leire, but Leire who triggers memories of it in him. Ismael had originally shot Leire when she challenged him with her accusing gaze as he ate her chocolate. As his kidnap victim, years later, she does not look at him accusingly but blankly (it is not clear how Ismael recognizes her as

a teenager, but he appears to connect the fixity of her blank stare at him, as she passes the open door of the night club where he is confronting the drug dealer, with the fixity of her accusing stare as a child). Leire's blank stare, and Ismael's fascinated staring at her, raise the question of the relation between power and the gaze. This is an issue crucial to gaze theory, which has formed the central plank of feminist film criticism.

Shaviro takes gaze theory, as instituted by Laura Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and its 1981 sequel "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' " (Mulvey 14–38), to task for assuming that cinematic pleasure comprises a "masculine" desire (whether exercised by male or female spectators) to reduce the female characters on screen to the status of "objects of the gaze." Shaviro suggests that such a desire for control is in fact a defense against what he sees as the principal pleasure offered by cinema: that of abandoning oneself to possession by the cinematic image (9–17). He argues that Mulvey, while criticizing the "masculine" gaze that objectifies women on screen, is herself advocating such a "masculine" position by deconstructing cinematic pleasure, thereby refusing to be seduced by it (12–13). This defensive posture has, he argues, come to constitute an orthodoxy: "It seems as if theorists of the past twenty years can scarcely begin their discussions without ritualistically promising to resist the insidious seductions of film" (11). He notes that this fear of images is supported by the whole history of the Western philosophical tradition, which since Plato has "warned us against being seduced by reflections and shadows" (15)—that is, by cinema. What, Shaviro asks, is wrong with allowing oneself to be seduced? Might this not be a refusal (whether by male or female spectators) of the patriarchal order that insists on "mastery" as the precondition of being an individual self?

Shaviro notes that Kaja Silverman's later theorization of the gaze from a Lacanian perspective does allow for a kind of gaze (what she terms "the look," to distinguish it from the controlling "gaze") that declares its vulnerability in the face of the power of the image (Shaviro 57–59). Silverman also observes that, by opting for the position of object of the gaze (that is, by making oneself into a spectacle), one can exert considerable power over others. Her key example, from Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul*, is a male character, the Turkish immigrant Ali who is othered not by his gender but by his ethnicity (Silverman, *Male Subjectivity* 125–56). Thus Silverman does not radically break with the traditional psychoanalytic schema whereby men—driven by lack through their inscription into the symbolic order—are the owners of desire, and women—whose entry into the symbolic order remains problematic, since they can never fully separate from the feminine body—its objects. As Shaviro comments (59),

Silverman is still operating within the framework of psychoanalytic film criticism, which supposes that the medium—which appears to give us the real, but in fact only gives us a play of shadows on screen—is characterized by lack, and consequently functions as an emblem of the symbolic order of language that represents the real while substituting for it.

Shaviro notes that Lacanian psychoanalysis remains within the Platonic tradition of mistrust of images in that "it denounces the delusions of the optical system . . . and privileges the Symbolic order of language in opposition to an Imaginary defined primarily in visual terms" (15). Thus the cinematic image is treated suspiciously by psychoanalytic film criticism for giving us representation (surface) rather than essence (depth). Shaviro asks:

> But is it really *lack* that makes images so dangerous and disturbing? What these theorists fear is not the emptiness of the image, but its weird fullness; not its impotence so much as its power . . . Images are banally self-evident and self-contained, but their superficiality and obviousness is also a strange blankness, a resistance to the closure of definition, or to any imposition of meaning. Images are neither true nor false, neither real nor artificial, neither present nor absent; they are radically devoid of essence. (17)

Leire's blankness, at which Ismael gazes in obsessive fascination, is an embodiment of this concept of cinematic pleasure, derived from abandoning ego boundaries rather than asserting them.

Shaviro insists that cinema is an intensely material medium, which overwhelms us with tactile, corporeal sensations. *The Cinematic Body* is an attempt to engage with that materiality, and to explore the pleasures that result from abandoning oneself to it. For Shaviro, the pleasures of the cinematic gaze are derived not from any attempt to assert control, but from a masochistic immersion in the material images that overwhelm one's senses. Cinema thus has the merit of "undoing the security and possessiveness that have conventionally been associated with the 'male gaze' " (9). Leire—the "stupid body," which is capable of vision but not of language—is not only beautiful but incontinent. She thus embodies a cinematic pleasure that is about opening the body up and admitting its porousness: what Shaviro—following Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*—calls a "radical passivity" (Shaviro 48). Thus Shaviro defines voyeurism or scopophilia as "the opposite of mastery: it is rather a forced, ecstatic abjection before the image" (49).

Both *The Cinematic Body* and *Powers of Horror* are explorations of abjection. Kristeva's analysis offers itself as a way of making sense of *La madre muerta* because Leire is marked both by loss of the maternal body and by a fascination with chocolate, which in turn is associated in the film with mud and excrement, as Conway (73–100) and Martin-Márquez have noted. Little Leire's accusing stare at Ismael in the film's prologue is an immediate response not to his shooting of her mother, but to his eating of her chocolate. The film's poster is headed with the words "Matar es tan fácil como robar un dulce a un niño. . . . pero menos peligroso" ("Killing is as easy as stealing a sweet from a child . . . but less dangerous"). Both Leire and Ismael have a passion for chocolate. Ismael's supplying of Leire with chocolate while she is his hostage, and again at the end of the film when he returns to find her at the clinic for the disabled, can be seen as his way of asking her forgiveness: a forgiveness that is accepted at a bodily level since Leire takes the chocolate on every occasion—her one gesture of recognition toward him. We are told at the start by Blanca, the nurse at the clinic, that Leire is diabetic. If she cannot assimilate sugar, this would explain her craving for chocolate. What the film does not explain is how, if Leire is diabetic, she does not become ill during the several days when she is held hostage by Ismael, given that she is not receiving insulin and is being plied with chocolate regularly. A physical explanation of her love of chocolate does not fully work. A psychoanalytic explanation suggests itself through the association of chocolate with mud and excrement, allowing it to figure the pre-Oedipal state of union with the mother, before the child has learned to distinguish the contours of its "clean and proper body" through toilet training and learning what food may and may not be eaten. "Es caca" ("It's shit"), Ismael tells Leire when she picks the chocolate up from the mud by the railway tracks and puts it in her mouth. A similar association of chocolate with what should not be taken into the mouth is set up in the scene when the nurse Blanca, having broken into the house where Leire is held captive, hides behind the wardrobe and watches, horrified, as Leire appears to go toward Ismael to suck his penis; in the following shot—seen by the spectator and not Blanca—Ismael zips up the bottom pocket of his leather jacket and we realize she has been sucking the chocolate he has taken out of his pocket to give her.

This scene started with Blanca, who we are told at the start has bladder problems, involuntarily urinating. Incontinence—lack of control over the body—is thus associated with a "normal" character as well as with the disabled and/or traumatized Leire. Blanca's killing by Maite is represented obliquely through the image of her urine on the ground

mixing with a pool of blood. Ismael's brutal killing of the drug dealer early in the film is a reversal of this incontinence, with liquid breeching the body's boundaries by entering it rather than leaving it, as Ismael pours beer into his mouth until he suffocates.

The film's powerful final scene as, in the pouring rain, Leire takes the bar of chocolate held out by Ismael, prostrate on his knees before her, links chocolate with dissolution—and with mud as Leire, pulled away by the Directora of the clinic, drops the chocolate in the mud in which Ismael is lying, pinned down by the male nurses. When Leire breaks free from the Directora to go back to Ismael, we expect a redemptive end—brutally frustrated as Leire bends to pick up the chocolate from the mud and go back to the Directora, leaving Ismael—immersed in the mud, in his mud-brown leather jacket—to his fate. In this final scene, the chocolate is also associated with blood, as Leire wipes chocolate over her cheeks, only to discover the blood left on her face by the caress of Ismael's wounded hand.

During this embrace, Ismael presses his face to her breast, screwed up like that of a newborn infant—an expression he adopts again at the end as, Leire having retrieved the chocolate and abandoned him, he sinks his head back into the mud. This final sequence follows an unexplained scene in a railway carriage—separated from the previous and succeeding scenes by abrupt editing, disrupting our sense of time and place. In the previous nighttime scene, Ismael, shot in the hand by Maite and having left Leire—also shot by Maite—at the hospital unconscious, had leapt into a goods wagon to escape the police. We cut to Ismael sitting in a passenger carriage (on the same train?), in daylight, his hand bandaged. The previous scene by the railway tracks when Maite shot Leire and Ismael was covered by autumn leaves; outside the train carriage we see snow on the ground. There seems to have been a break in time or place. The following scene cuts to Ismael back outside the clinic, with leaves again on the ground, his hand still bandaged and bleeding but Leire apparently recovered from what appeared to be a gunshot wound in the body. The dislocation and temporal incoherence is increased by the unexplained events in the intermediate scene in the passenger carriage, as Ismael finds himself sitting next to a woman, wearing a blue shawl like the Madonna, holding an infant in her arms. An unidentified man sits down opposite her, wrinkles his nose (as does Ismael) at the smell, and the woman takes off the male baby's diaper to reveal a wad of excrement looking much like a half-melted bar of chocolate. She gives the soiled diaper to the unknown man, who exchanges looks with Ismael, huddled in his chocolate-brown (excrement-colored) leather jacket. At this point we cut to Ismael outside the clinic, stalking Leire. The film's

closing scenes set up a correlation between blood, chocolate, mud, and excrement, which inevitably recalls Kristeva's analysis of the abject as that which threatens body boundaries by entering or leaving the body (blood, chocolate, excrement), or through its formlessness (mud). Most pertinent here is Kristeva's observation that such abject substances are associated with the maternal body: in *La madre muerta* the blood is reminiscent not of menstrual blood, but of the blood that we—and Leire—saw trickle over her dying mother's face.

La madre muerta is a thriller, with an intensely Gothic visual style. It is, in other words, a film about horror. Its images are also—like its female protagonist—strikingly beautiful, as is its musical soundtrack. As previously noted, Kristeva argues that writers have been able to give themselves up to the abject through language, which permits them to "master" it while exploring the pleasures—and terrors—of release from ego boundaries. But what happens when the exploration of the abject takes place not through language (Leire cannot speak, and Ismael speaks very little) but through images and music? While Ismael is driven crazy by the fact that Leire never laughs—never acknowledges his capacity to affect her—he is quite happy that she does not speak: "hablar no es importante" ("talking isn't important"), he insists. Ismael's relationship to Leire is also mediated by smell: at first he is repelled by the smell of excrement as she soils herself; later he sniffs her body and exclaims, "!Qué bien hueles, hueles a chocolatina!" ("You smell so nice, you smell of chocolate"). It is possible to read the film as a demonstration of Kristeva's theorization of the abject as a zone of bodily exclusions, related to the need to separate from the maternal body, whose exploration can produce an ecstatic release from ego boundaries as well as horror. Thus Ismael's screws up his face like a newborn baby both when he presses it to Leire's breast and when he sinks it into the mud, as if returning to the pre-Oedipal symbiosis with the mother. Such a reading fits with Kristeva's insistence on the abject as a "sacred configuration" (*Powers of Horror* 6)—that is, a kind of secular redemption in a world devoid of religious belief. The repeated images of Madonna and Child in the film—in Leire's mother's studio at the start, later visited by Blanca, who takes the photograph of Leire in her mother's arms home with her; and in the abandoned cathedral where Ismael and Maite take refuge with Leire after killing Blanca—suggest such a sacred space: a space of bonding with the maternal. Kristeva notes that Christianity, through the figure of the Virgin Mary, introduces the maternal into a previously paternal monotheism (*Powers of Horror* 116). But, for Kristeva, Christianity links the abject to the sacred through the practice of confession, which makes "spoken sin" into "fortunate sin": that is, language—the "Law of the Father"—allows one to take abjection upon

oneself in order to purge oneself of it. Kristeva notes that the Christian practice of confession was responsible for creating the modern Western notion of the individual self, through this interiorization of abjection in order to triumph over it (*Powers of Horror* 130–32).

It is not clear whether *La madre muerta* can be read as a redemption narrative. Any redemptive message it may offer comes not from language, but from the beauty of its images and musical soundtrack—that is, from those aspects of cinema that impress themselves on the body. This is a kind of redemption that comes not from transcending the abject but from plunging into it. The cathedral is derelict, and the Madonna images are associated with violence. The final scene, set to the swelling violins of the theme song, appears to offer Ismael redemption as Leire accepts his offer of chocolate and caresses his head as he presses it to her bosom—only to leave him abandoned in the mud, making it clear that what mattered to her was the chocolate (Martín-Márquez, "Disability"; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 192). This devastating end dispels any illusions on the spectator's part that Leire may have acquired a degree of subjectivity—a capacity to love—through her abject experience of captivity: her only capacity for love remains a physical craving for chocolate. Blanca and Maite are dead, the latter by her own hand as she realizes Ismael cares more for Leire than her. Leire walks off to a presumed future as the adoptive daughter of the Directora (who at the start told Blanca she was thinking of adopting her), whose institutional status and somewhat rigid body language suggest a future in which Leire will be trained to adhere to the "clean and proper body." This, if we accept Kristeva's analysis, means putting behind her the bond with the "dead mother" whose absent presence dominates the film—not least through its title. In other words, learning to "grow up," for Leire's "abnormality" consists of continuing to behave like an infant, prior to language and the formation of ego boundaries.

The film's stylized images are built around the colors blue and red. Its director of photography and cameraman, Javier Aguirresarobe, has noted that most of the frames contain a red object, which stands out against the pale or gloomy background like a gash or wound (Seguin 934). The most obvious examples are the balls that the Directora of the clinic and the nurse Blanca are clutching during their first meeting; Maite's sweater, cardigan, handbag, or underwear; the fruit in Maite and Ismael's kitchen; the lipstick with which Ismael daubs his face in his clown act; the red of Maite's gloves as she prepares to shoot Leire; the tartan blanket in the cathedral; the red front of the second train under which Ismael tries to throw Leire; the red lining of Ismael's leather jacket; and above all the red wall behind the bed where Leire is chained as Ismael's hostage (the

room also has a red lamp and red curtains). These splashes of red remind us of the blood we saw trickle over the face of Leire's dying mother; the credits after the film's violent prologue also place the actors' names over a growing pool of red. In the ripped painting of the Madonna and Child on which Ismael's torch alights in this prologue, the Madonna's veil is—unusually—red rather than blue. As Martín-Márquez notes, the gash in this painting is echoed by the crack in the red wall of the room where Leire is held hostage. We are introduced to this room by the shot of a hand (which the zoom-out reveals to be Leire's) fingering the crack, as if lingering on the open wound of her mother's death.

A large number of scenes are filmed through a blue filter, the color blue being associated with the Madonna's veil—as in the statues and paintings of the Madonna in Leire's mother's studio (apart from the red-veiled Madonna in the ripped canvas), and as in the statue of the Madonna in the derelict cathedral. The color blue is also traditionally associated with melancholy, as here through its juxtaposition with the wistful theme music; this melancholic association links the Madonna with the theme of the lost mother. In addition to the monochrome blue of the violent prologue (apart from the Madonna images illuminated by Ismael's torch and the drop of blood falling over Leire's mother's point-of-view shot), certain scenes in the Gothic mansion where Ismael and Maite are squatting are also filmed in monochrome blue or have a blue tint (mostly interrupted with a splash of red). The most striking moments when the screen is flooded with blue are the two night-time scenes by the railway tracks, when Ismael first drags Leire there to throw her under a train, and later when he leaps into a goods train; plus the whole of the sequence when Ismael and Maite take Leire to the abandoned cathedral. Both locations—the railway tracks and the cathedral—are given an apocalyptic feel by the intensity of the blue light, which turns scenes of devastation and impending doom into scenes of stunning visual beauty. This is a beauty that does not allow detached aesthetic contemplation but that overwhelms us physically.

The physicality of the film's striking images is compounded by the soundtrack. In the cathedral, Ismael furiously pedals the organ bellows, filling its derelict space with a nightmarish, swelling cacophony. In the second scene by the railway tracks, filmed in daylight with a slight blue tint, a similar effect of horror is created by the sound and then sight of the sparks produced by the overhead electric cables, as the approaching (red-fronted) train hurtles toward Leire and Ismael—and us. Shaviro recalls the physical shock produced in spectators by the approaching train in the first Lumière brothers' film (33). The electric charges given off by the cables in this scene subject the audience to a series of acoustic and

visual shocks. Something similar happens when we are first introduced to the Gothic mansion where Ismael and Maite are squatting: the long traveling shot around its corridors is interrupted by the sound and sight of shattering glass as Ismael thrusts Maite's head through an interior window. Bajo Ulloa has said that, in filming *La madre muerta*, "busqué una razón muy fuerte para contar algo que a mí pudiera hacerme daño como espectador" (Heredero, *20 nuevos* 48): the film is an assault on the spectator's hearing and vision. The film's use of long traveling shots is worthy of comment, given that Giuliana di Bruno has, like Shaviro, argued that cinema spectatorship is primarily a physical, tactile experience, since the movements of the camera—particularly in a traveling shot—take us into the image. The physicality of the two scenes by the railway tracks is heightened by the long tracking shots as we follow Ismael dragging Leire to her intended death.

Equally physical in its effects is the film's theme music, composed by Bingen Mendizábal. First heard in the prologue, its subsequent reprises take the spectator back to this inaugural moment of violence, its haunting phrases acting as a constant reminder of the loss of the mother. The jarring note struck by the violins in this prologue as Ismael's torch falls on the ripped canvas of the Madonna and Child is also reprised as the train approaches on the first occasion when Ismael attempts to throw Leire under it. Throughout the film there is a striking lack of synchronicity between the editing of image and soundtrack: frequently, the theme music continues over two or more disparate sequences, providing a kind of *enjambement* that works against the often violent visual cutting. For example, the theme music that plays over the final scene where Ismael returns to Leire at the clinic had already come in at the end of the previous scene with the mother changing the baby's diaper on the train.

Particularly striking is the use of editing to start a scene not with an establishing shot, but with that of a body part, whose identity is only later revealed through a zoom-out. This technique is in place from the moment of the film's opening close-up of the photograph of Leire with her mother, revealed to be a photograph as the camera pulls away. It could be argued that this focus on body parts provides an external correlate to Leire's infantilized vision, whose interiority is never revealed to us. But it also seems to correspond to the vision of Ismael—as, for example, when he comes round from unconsciousness to see the disembodied face of the dead Señora Millas, only then taking in the whole scene in her kitchen, in which she lies dead, artistically positioned amid the spilled Bovril and chopped vegetables. This focus on body parts is especially evident in the scene when Ismael touches Leire's breast—the same left breast on which the camera focused in its opening close-up of the photograph of Leire's mother with the infant Leire in her arms.

Heredero (*20 nuevos* 46) compares the camera work of Bajo Ulloa's first film, *Alas de mariposa,* to that of Robert Bresson, in its concern with the material image—despite the fact that Bajo Ulloa claimed not to know Bresson's work. (*La madre muerta* does, however, pay tribute to Truffaut when Ismael and Maite go to watch one of his films.) Shaviro's last chapter on Bresson notes: "It is only through an intense and precise attention to the body that Bresson broaches his ultimate religious themes of loss and redemption" (242). What Shaviro means by this is that Bresson, like Warhol, evacuates his characters' subjectivity and finds redemption in abjection. This is a different kind of redemption from that which Kristeva describes as achieved by transcending the abject. Here there is no transcendence but just the flesh, not organized by any controlling subjective vision. Shaviro notes that Bresson often focuses on hands and feet, as body parts that "are not conventionally taken to signify inner states" (243), while the facial expressions of his characters are blank. Both of these techniques characterize *La madre muerta*. Shaviro finds Bresson's evacuation of subjectivity "redemptive" in that it rescues his characters from any subordination to a spectatorial controlling gaze, since they simply "are," in their enigmatic materiality. This is redemption in the sense of an acceptance of the body "in which grace is indistinguishable from suffering and abjection" (Shaviro 252).

Shaviro's chapters all end with the word "abjection": "passivity and abjection," "new ecstasies of abjection," "opening to abjection," "self-abandonment and abjection," "ecstasy and terror of abjection," "secret pleasures of abjection," "embarrassment and abjection," "a vision in which grace is indistinguishable from suffering and abjection" (the chapter on Bresson), "affirmation and abjection." This is an abjection that can provide redemption from the straightjacket of the modern Western self, which defines itself through its exclusions. Most radically, it involves abandoning the privileging of self over matter. As Shaviro notes:

> In Western thought, the body has generally been regarded as an affront to the intelligence, an obstacle to both thought and action. The body is passive matter waiting to be shaped by the logos's articulating form. Or it is something that needs to be regulated and contained—this is why it is subjected to the canons of representation. (257)

Cinema, Shaviro argues, can get beyond the Cartesian dualism of mind and body by thinking through, rather than against, the body. This is another way of saying that cinema creates its effects through the corporeal qualities of images and sound. In other words, cinema does not function as a language in the Lacanian sense of the loss of the real, but gives us

the real in the form of the material. As Shaviro puts it: "Cinema allows me and forces me to see what I cannot assimilate or grasp. It assaults the eye and ear, it touches and it wounds . . . This touch, this contact, is excessive: it threatens my very sense of self" (260).

Heredero notes that, despite the acclaim granted to Bajo Ulloa's first film, *Alas de mariposa*, *La madre muerta* flopped at the box office (*20 nuevos* 46). Critics have mostly ignored it (the MLA international bibliography lists not a single article on it), though in its year of release (1993) it won an impressive number of awards at international film festivals: in Puerto Rico, the International Critics' Prize for Best Film and the Public's Prize for Best Film; in Stockholm, the Critics' Prize for Best Film and the Prize for Best Actress (Ana Álvarez); and in Montreal, the Prize for Best Director. In the wake of this international acclaim, the film was released on video with English subtitles. As a result of the film's lack of popularity with Spanish audiences, Bajo Ulloa radically changed his style, making the hugely successful comedy *Airbag* (1997) and then directing no more feature films till 2004 (he worked with Julio Medem on *Tierra* in 1996, and Medem conversely worked with Bajo Ulloa on *Airbag*). One senses that the Spanish critics that have written about *La madre muerta* are disconcerted by the film's refusal of a symbolic reading—such as those that can be given to Medem's films, for example. In particular, critics seem to have found this hard to accept of a young Basque director, whose work they are keen to interpret as in some way "Basque." Although *La madre muerta* was filmed in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Salvatierra-Agurain (Álava)—but also Miranda de Ebro in Burgos—there is nothing in the film that allows a reading in terms of Basque politics. Seguin, however, has attempted one, suggesting that "el mundo claustrofóbico de la película es a su vez metáfora de Euskal Herria . . . Detrás del destino trágico de los personajes . . . ¿cómo no vislumbramos la imagen de una sociedad traumatizada por sus propios terrores y sus propios demonios?" ("the claustrophic world of the film is also a metaphor for the Basque Country . . . Behind its characters' tragic fate . . . how can we fail to glimpse the image of a society traumatized by its terrors and demons?" 935). Seguin has, I would suggest, missed the point of Bajo Ulloa's insistence on the corporeal nature of the cinematic image and soundtrack, which preempt psychologized and symbolic readings. We can appreciate *La madre muerta* better if we abandon the attempt to read coherent meaning into it, and give ourselves up to its visual and acoustic pleasures. This does not mean abandoning analysis, but analyzing the film in terms of what it does to us: that is, as performative rather than representational.

10

The Catalan Body Politic as Aired in *La teta i la lluna* (Bigas Luna, 1994)

Dominic Keown

To say that the theme of national identity was a constant preoccupation in Spanish cinema would be to say really very little indeed. The nature of the Spaniard has been the subject of countless filmic essays from the official version as peddled by the cinema loyal to the values of the dictatorship to dissident directors and eventually nowadays to the contemporary generation or so-called children of Franco. Time and again, the locus for deliberation has returned to the familiar arena of the bullfight, whose standard male iconography has formed the object of speculation for an endless list of artists, official and dissident, the most celebrated of whom would be Sáenz de Heredia, Berlanga, Saura, Almodóvar, and Bigas Luna.

In the case of the latter of this eminent list, however, the matter tends to be problematized still more acutely, as Bigas not only comes to question the legitimacy of machista behavior, as is typical of the other figures mentioned here, but also the validity of the term "Spanish" in itself. Whereas his equally belligerent contemporaries tend to accept the pertinence of this national stereotype working critically and antagonistically within its parameters, Bigas's superbly heavy-handed and exaggerated treatment of this and other familiar icons of "Spanishness" disputes fundamentally the assumed relevance of such constructs and the facility of

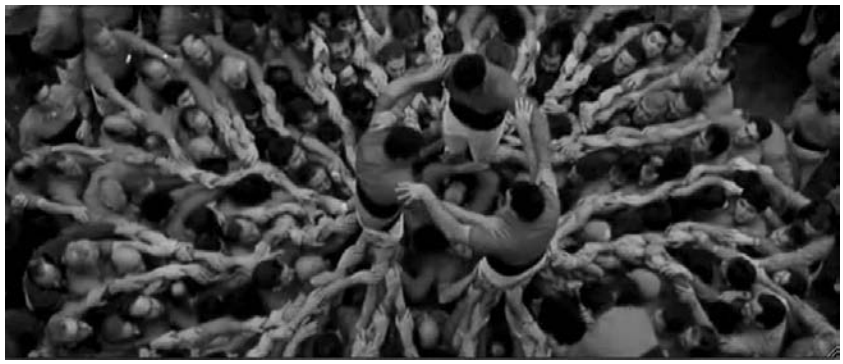

Fig. 10. Human tower in *La teta i la lluna*. Courtesy of Lolafilms.

their reference. It is this type of critical reassessment of the monolith of national identity, so typical of the Iberian trilogy, which seems to evade a director like Almodóvar, who, in *Todo sobre mi madre*, can locate a film in the Catalan capital as if, historically and linguistically, this were quite simply any other part of Spain.

It is precisely with the speculation of nation and nationalism in mind that it is intriguing to consider the ingenuous but provocative chapter of *Teta i la lluna* (*The Tit and the Moon*). Here, however, the examination of the topic acquires a physical dimension in the exploration of the body politic within the confines of Catalonia as, to a large extent, the notion of Spain and Spanishness disappears from view. The film fixes more specifically on the complicated nature of Catalan ethnic identity and its attempt as a minority culture to reinvent and reassemble itself within the contemporary geopolitical configuration. The scholarship dedicated thus far to the movie has tended to approach the question in theoretical and speculative terms. In keeping with the somatic nature of the piece, however, I would like to emphasize here the full weight of the no less corporeal dimension of Catalan national consciousness, whose permanence and historical tangibility is elicited by Bigas with both irony and affection.[1]

For a complete appreciation of this phenomenon, however, it might prove fruitful to remind ourselves of certain basic details which, though obvious, tend not to be afforded due consideration in the wider historical context. First, the struggle for the respect and defense of the ethnic personality of Catalonia (in other words, Catalanism) is an impulse which, despite continuous and savage repression from successive centralist regimes since the disaster year of 1714, has managed to survive—almost

uniquely for a stateless nation in the modern geopolitical configuration of Western Europe—through a strategy of either confrontation or inventive renegotiation with the adversity of prevailing circumstance. As such, it is no mere opportunistic offshoot of the collapse of the dictatorship, dependent on the ideology peddled by one particular individual or political grouping.[2]

Moreover, in general—and for reasons of a clearly tendentious nature—historiography on both the Left and the Right of the political divide has, unfortunately and unhelpfully, tended to deal with this question in a globalizing fashion as a variety of discordant schools of thought are lumped haphazardly together under the label of a blanket movement. National sentiment in Catalonia is incalculably more complex in its expression—though no less pervasive—than is imagined elsewhere in the Peninsula and should rather be considered in its historical completeness if a comprehensive appreciation of its nature is to be afforded. Indeed, it is toward this particular area of political deliberation that Bigas Luna initially directs our attention with reference to a very particular historical context.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Unitarian kingdom of Spain, which had existed in its present form since 1714, was in chronic and irreversible decline. Unusually in a contemporary European context wherein dynamic centralism held sway over the regressive periphery, it was in many ways the renascent northern coastal areas of Catalonia and to a lesser extent Euskal Herria that offered the most effective alternative program of political and economic regeneration. In this configuration, the Bourgeoisie Conquérante in Catalonia sought to acquire and expend greater political influence through the agency of their recently founded representative party, the Lliga Regionalista. Confronted with the chronic economic mismanagement of an arcanely corrupt, agrarian, and centralist administration—which had led inevitably to the chaotic nadir of 1898—the Catalan wealth creators resolved to flex their communal muscle in an attempt to achieve an equitable distribution of power and control. As they saw it, a new and actual realignment—in which the dynamics of modern capitalism would wrench protagonism from the stifling antidemocratic grip of a decadent, landowning oligarchy—would bring Spain more into line with the economic and demographic reality of contemporary Europe and, by so doing, afford a more imaginative and realistically secure future for the state as a whole.

In an attempt to prosecute this enterprise with the utmost expediency, the bourgeois Right involved itself in a newfound and dynamic embracing of the nationalist cause that made further demonstration of their regenerative instinct and sense of difference. The conversion to a

more militant and nationalist form of Catalanism by the dominant class brought about as a corollary an ideologically pervasive revision of the cultural personality of the ethnic group. From a position of social protagonism the Lliga reformulated notions of the autochthonous character through the promotion of the ideologically charged artistic program of *Noucentisme*, the ethical and aesthetical "gospel" as devised by their "intellectual dictator" and "pontiff," Eugeni d'Ors.[3]

Needless to say, in this context the values promoted creatively by the local Right were essentially bourgeois and entirely synonymous with those championed by their Victorian counterparts—that is, of course, decency, civility, urbanity and, above all, social order. Similarly, in this class-conscious environment the timeworn sentiments of exclusivity, purity, and authenticity would be the familiar cornerstones of the national character with a focus, almost to the point of obsession, on the language as the ultimate determining and defining factor. Unfortunately, given the hegemony of this tendency in the crucial years of 1890–1923 and the ensuing cultural extirpation executed with the most unimaginably savage rigor throughout six long decades of centralist dictatorial rule, Catalanism has suffered in that it has become associated exclusively with this particular conservative tendency; and it is precisely this reductive misconception that Bigas will strive to rectify.

There is, for example, an equally influential progressive element at the heart of national sentiment in the principality, which has its roots in the autochthonous liberal, socialist, communist, and even anarchist contribution to the contemporary history of the collective.[4] Aware of their national difference, this alternative faction would seek to celebrate the indigenous but from a progressive, noninsular perspective. Significantly, it is from this liberal current that emerges the more flexible national sentiment prevalent in the democratic arena of today. Predicated on the admirably inclusive formula devised a generation ago by Jordi Pujol, leader of Convergència i Unió, the universally accepted definition of Catalan is quite simply and heterogeneously anyone who lives and works in Catalonia. It is precisely the preferability of this tendency over the conservative strain that Bigas Luna will be at pains to emphasize throughout the film.[5]

In his attempt to explode a series of myths, whether these relate in conservative terms to the concept of national purity as basis for definition of the collective, or the concomitantly spurious corollary of the identification of ethnic sentiment with these same forces of reaction, Bigas problematizes masterfully at the level of narrative a third assumed and similarly unreliable totalizing postulation. The plot is by no means linear but develops rather at the level of theme functioning, in familiar psychological terms, around the resolution of an Oedipus complex. The

unraveling of the adventure, however, is depicted with such heavyhandedness and exaggeration that the legitimacy of the formula and the facility of its universal application is called necessarily into question.

The complex develops along conventional lines as Tete, the child protagonist (Biel Duran), must vanquish his father as a rival for the loving attention of his mother. The rite of passage is depicted accordingly with the young hero being set the labor of scaling the human castles of popular Catalan culture in order to liberate and possess the princess in the tower, thereby killing the dragon of his father.

In due course the forbidden desire is transposed allusively onto a secondary Oedipal scheme. In this parallel, we see Tete redirect the desire for his mother onto the dancer Estrellita (Mathilda May). Likewise Maurice, her husband (Gérard Darmon), is transformed into the surrogate father and Miquel (Miguel Poveda), the brother and rival for the affection of the mother. Despite the disarming tone of the narrative, however, it is evident that the depiction of the complex frequently fringes on the grotesque both in the pathologically obsessive uncovering of breasts, which seemingly spill out from every possible nook and cranny and the magnificently excessive performance of Tete's father (Abel Folk), whose rendition of the ogre patriarch is nothing short of hilarious in its testicular fixation and accompanying phallic referent of the human castles.

The intention behind the caricature of this familiar figure is more than relevant to our context. In the primal scene of Freud's imagined romance, the figure of the symbolic father establishes civilization, saving the family unit from the chaos of the primordial jungle. The symbolic function of the patriarch as the bestower of law, and the analogue of the phallus conveyed graphically here by the human castles were fundamental to basic principles of the creation and governance of the collective family of the nation: what might be termed the lore of the father or, more simply, the correlation between father and fatherland.

Against the skeptical projection of this psycho-national backdrop, a revealing examination is enacted between national sentiments in their conservative and progressive forms. Between the ethnic exclusiveness of the patriarchs, both Maurice (French) and Tete's father (Catalan) with their customary chauvinism and, as an alternative, the inclusive national instinct proclaimed antithetically elsewhere in the celebration of intercultural amalgam: the cross-fertilization of ethnic discourses. In the framework of this debate on the varying nature of collective sentiment, resistance to the exclusive precepts of patriarchy and contrasting eulogy of racial melange is underscored.

In this respect, the location is crucial as the selection of an authentically proletarian resort on the Catalan coast (Castelldefells) evokes what

is historically a locus for international interface. The Mediterranean constitutes the fulcrum of ancient European civilization, and North Eastern Iberia epitomizes this crossroads of trade and culture, a factor underlined toponymically by the neighboring region of Empordà with its etymological roots in the Greco-Latin "Emporium." All the wayfarers from European antiquity have left their mark here: the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, Visigoths, Moors and, in more modern times, the French. A multicultural and plurilingual visitation reflected nowadays by that most contemporary of colonizations, tourism.

Evidently, in such a cosmopolitan environment exclusiveness or introspective racial purity has no meaning; and throughout we are constantly reminded of this aurally. The insistent and mutually comprehensive interaction of three languages simultaneously (Catalan, French, and Spanish)—and the lingua franca of English eccentrically—underlines not only the enrichment the director envisages in variety but also the profound harmonious interchange and sense of mutual understanding that triumphs over superficial rivalry and difference. Ultimately, the film affords an open and inclusive sense of peculiarity: a celebration of individuality within a framework of multicultural and plurilingual cohabitation.

Indeed, the universality of the experience is underscored by the fact that the cultural contribution is, likewise, not hierarchically exclusive but horizontally demotic. At one end of the spectrum we witness elements that represent the media of high culture such as Estrellita's dance in the medium of ballet. This elite idiom, however, finds natural accompaniment in the more low-brow vocal culture of song: both in the haunting lyricism of Edith Piaf's familiar melody and in the taut euphony of the emotive frustration of Miquel's flamenco interjections. Various aspects of the autochthonous personality act as individual counterpoint to this creative popularism: most notably the building of human castles, the visually appetizing *pa amb tomàquet* and also the motif of the *porró*, whose allusive national value extends beyond any merely libational function.

More important in this cultural spectrum, however, is the extent to which Bigas will privilege the value of popular creativity as evinced by the person of Maurice the petomane. Culture is thus celebrated in all its expressive levels, from the effete delicacy of ballet to the raucous belly laugh of scatology: a vision as universal as the inclusive mutuality of the progressive national consciousness that Bigas champions.

In ideological terms, however, there is also much to be made of the corporeal presence of the Gallic *fartiste*. In the first place, there is an intrinsically ludic dialectic established in his person between, on the one hand, the hyperserious nature of his chauvinistic prurience—as, with

fitting care and devotion, he launders the *tricouleur* daily to keep it unsullied—and, on the other, the outrageous scatology of his profession.

The equation is explored in more detail in the crucial sequence of the music-hall act where the essentially contrived nature of chauvinistic sentiment is foregrounded graphically by the artifice of the backdrop of the Parisian silhouette. Tete's inquisitive gaze dwells significantly on the studied mechanics of the contraption that, eliciting iconographically the essence of French greatness with the image of the Arc de Triomphe, underscores the process of edification of "patriotism" in all the inauthenticity of its external nurturing. Indeed, the hollowness of such fabrication has already been exposed as we have learned that this epitome of Gallic manhood astride his phallic motorcycle is, in fact, impotent.

The relevance of such an exaggerated figure would not be lost on the domestic audience, especially with the common bond he shares with Tete's father, who exudes a similarly recalcitrant bullishness in the ethnic sphere far more consistent with the Spanish stereotype manifest in the other components of the Iberian trilogy. The insistent *machista* reference to genitalia as he exhorts his son to the top of the castle is paradigmatic in this respect. The fixation with testosterone is inevitably humorous in the sense that it is entirely atypical in terms of the Catalan character. What is more, the standard exhortation of a leader of a group of *castellers* is not explosive but calm, measured, and determined in order to support rather than distract those involved in the construction.

The caricature is completed exquisitely with the graphic representation through Tete's eyes of his progenitor as a Roman centurion, with all the recalcitrant imperialism that the image connotes. Though outlandish expansionist dreams sometimes cropped up in the rhetoric of the Lliga, the hilarious irrelevance in the contemporary body politic of such outdated reactionary values among the autochthonous proletariat is appropriately exposed by the outrageous visual incongruity of him working as pump attendant on a garage forecourt while attired in this Latin military regalia. In this way, the representatives of anachronistic chauvinist intention are hilariously lampooned to underline the complete irrelevance of the nationalist sentiment they embrace.

Throughout the music-hall sequence, however, the director strives to underline both the value of authentic national identity and also the appreciation of the enrichment of ethnic integration. This is evident first in the boat pushed onto the stage to open the show. Aboard, the singers celebrate local tradition as they intone *havaneres* while mixing the local delicacy of blazing *rom cremat*. Both these items, however, are not indigenous but were rather renationalized as authentically Catalan

phenomena in the course of time. Their origin lies overseas as they are cultural imports from the colonial adventure in Cuba where Catalan involvement was particularly long-lasting and marked.

If the director's overall intention is to privilege the harmonious mixture of human universality, the mise-en-scène of the petomane's performance could not be more appropriate. In terms of soundtrack, the lilting *havaneres* give way seamlessly to the plaintive lyricism of the celebrated chanteuse. Moreover, the ponderous yet delicate modulations of the camerawork in the repeated tilts, pans, and tracking shots move synchronically with each particular musical phrase to enhance the sense of equilibrium. The melodious effect is amplified visually by the flourishing warmth of the rich colors and the shots of both individuals and groups enhanced by the soft focus employed throughout and the equanimity of the lighting.

In similar fashion, the notion of inclusive universality is further elicited by the rich editing that allows views from a multitude of angles, which serve to underline the totality of the experience. A long series of point-of-view and reaction shots complement close-up and distance monitoring, all adding to the completeness of the experience. As Tete moves to watch Estrellita's dance, we are privileged through the tracking of a vision of the stage from both behind the scene and in front of it, in many ways a more complete impression of the artifice of representation than is generally afforded.

Additionally, the power of the gaze is never exclusive, as the audience views the performers and is, in turn, viewed by the latter. The depth of field of the shot selection adds to the effect: apart from the intermingling of the close-up, medium, and long-term, all three areas interact, on occasions, in the same frame, underlining once more the richness of the experience as, for example, when in the foreground we see the shoulder of Estrellita in her dance, Maurice in the medium term, and Tete's entrance into the background.

Bigas is generally appreciated for the abruptness or roughness of his idiom. In this case, however, the intention to instill a mood of harmony is patent in the direction of the repeated tilts from top to bottom and the accompanying pans from left to right. In the Western tradition this is natural movement when reading a picture or painting due, no doubt to the direction the eye follows when reading a page. All the sweeps in this sequence follow this norm. When the boat is brought in, the camera, placed to the left of center, tilts first down and then pans to the right. Similarly, as the camera dollies into the marquee, the same motion is described. The tracking shot of Tete's entrance and observation of the dance likewise follows the same trajectory. Indeed, the only exception occurs with the reverse shot of the audience from behind Estrellita's legs,

which is filmed from below to above and from right to left, thus acting as counterpoint, throwing into relief the central drift.

In keeping with the general tenor of subversive mischief, however, the figure of the petomane is much more relevant to the Catalan body politic than might be first imagined as, in a manner not unfamiliar among certain members of the creative elite, Bigas cannot resist the temptation of eliciting an elaborate and hermetic jibe at the expense of the Honorable President de la Generalitat. Bigas Luna's Frenchman is but a further cinematic reinvention of the legendary vaudeville star of Moulin Rouge fame, himself the subject of a Channel 4 film of 1979, as characterized by the irreplaceable Leonard Rossiter.[6] Indeed, the pertinence of the music-hall act to the director's opprobrious intention becomes patent in that the legendary petomane was, significantly, not only named Pujol but also of Catalan origin.[7]

Bigas Luna's recourse to scatology, however, goes far beyond the affectionate promotion of local color or the now customary sideswipe at Convergència i Unió's leader. Indeed, the speculation acquires a much more caustic ideological purpose when appreciated in the context of Catalan culture, particularly with respect to the elaboration of a national identity. As mentioned earlier, the crusade for political influence launched by the bourgeois Right at the start of the last century went hand-in-glove with the reconstitution of the autochthonous cultural voice. The magnates of the Lliga invested heavily in the patronage and promotion of "serious" and "elite" artistic idioms in a quest to reconstruct and impose an authentically urban and bourgeois cultural personality for the nation from a position of political protagonism.[8]

Such institutional sponsorship, as epitomized by the aesthetic of *Noucentisme*, led inevitably to the marginalization of the demotic vitality of the autochthonous subculture. Any form of creative popularism was further compromised by the heterophobic vandalism of two subsequent dictatorships. As is entirely understandable in this context, those works in the vernacular, which through some miracle actually managed to appear, were generally of a serious, high-cultural nature—geared at impressing through their quality in the international context—and exemplary of the conscious, artistic resistance among the clandestine authorship to defend a civilization challenged by the scourge of utter barbarity. Denied an outlet for its more demotic registers, twentieth-century Catalan culture was rarely able to express its idiomatic breadth but was rather obliged, initially by bourgeois design and subsequently by the adversity of historical circumstance, to limit its creative spectrum and privilege, albeit tenuously, the aesthetics of high art: a restrictive imposition that afforded an artificially precious and conformist veneer to the artistic exercise.

Needless to say, the subversive joy of an endemic demotic fixation with scatology—epitomized at the lower cultural level by the tradition of yuletide *caganers* and the secular ludic poetic eulogies of the *laus petandi*—was sadly overlooked and forgotten or duly exiled to the extra-official domain of the avant-garde.[9] It is hardly surprising, then, that the contemporary generation should mischievously reclaim the delights of the "funcions baixes" of the body with such panache. The ideological relevance of such creative indulgence in this context is apparent. Indeed, Empar Pérez-Corts has underlined the significance of this unofficial policy of demotic recovery in her revelation that there is nothing more healthily critical of the *noucentista*-inspired "official" vision of Catalonians as a people who are "net i polit" than the artistic celebration of the more indecorous corporal functions: the antithesis of the imposed elitism of high culture, a cornerstone of the twentieth-century bourgeois reconstruction of the Catalan creative personality.[10] In fact, the celebration of this trait in the occasional and apparently gratuitous excesses in the work of the contemporary creative generation—especially Belbel, Bigas Luna, Casassas, Monzó, Pons, etc.—might well be best understood as ideologically inspired artistic belligerence in the face of this repressive phenomenon.

Bigas's filmic representation of this issue, however, owes much in turn to Bakhtin's speculation on the ludic nature of the subversion of the "serious" message of officialdom. If the ingenious Slav was to indicate how Rabelaisian celebration of the indecorous lower body and its function was inevitably antagonistic to the solemn, preterite strictures of the Establishment, Bigas reapplies this formula in the petomane's destruction of the authority and immaculate sobriety of the bourgeois patriotic spirit. In this way, the serious discourse of high autochthonous culture based on the elevated purity of national sentiment in virtually all spheres is compromised by its inevitable association with the bathos of toilet humor.[11]

The centrality of such corporeal presence is particularly poignant in our present deliberation. Throughout the film, as anticipated by the title, the fixation with physiology is inescapable: from the somatic to the sexual, the reproductive to the psychopathological; from body-building to building with bodies. This is linked repeatedly both to progressive national instinct and also to the adaptability of the Catalan popular classes and their historic self-redefinition through the acceptance of the inclusiveness of immigration within the geopolitical confines of their territory.

Outlined in this fashion, the equation becomes hauntingly reminiscent of the issues of race, identity, and the body raised antagonistically in phenomenological deliberations by a series of francophone philosophers in the wake of Sartre's *Black Orpheus*. Jeremy Wheate has written pertinently

about Merleau-Pontian pre-dualistic ontology, which underwrites the reproductive synergy between body and world, and their mutual reordering of each other according to a perpetual contribution of reciprocal transfer. The speculation seems more than relevant to the physicality of the reshaping process described cinematically by Bigas Luna, and it is revealing to consider the denouement of the film in these transcendent terms.

> Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema reveals the relation between agency, freedom, and temporality. For Merleau-Ponty, the corporeal capacity of the body allows for a "communication" with the expressive patternings of the cultural traditions to which it belongs or has attached itself. Within the interplay between body and world prior to intellectual representation, the possibility of the creative inflection between both engenders a corporealized conception of freedom. The body is "free" to the extent that it can participate in the transformation of its expressive horizons. (Wheate, "Fanon" 169–83)

Despite the subversive irony that pervades the expression, what is posited repeatedly—and often problematically—is a bodily participation in the "transformation of its expressive horizons" as exemplified positively in the individual context of Tete scaling the human castle or collectively by the construction of the same edifice to include male and female, Catalans and immigrants: a corporeal representation of the inclusive ideology that has typified the contemporary Catalan experience.

In this respect, the rather desperate intellectual renegotiation of ethnic identity that D'Lugo locates in the fraught and perhaps ethereal sense of the transnational and external context of globalization might acquire a much more substantial, earthy dimension when considered from the perspective of the agency imagined by Merleau-Ponty. Quite apart from the immediacy of the political reference, what is to be applauded and enjoyed additionally from this perspective is the director's celebration of the enriching mixture of crosscultural fertilization expressed primarily through the intermingling of body, collective, and location and the possibilities offered by their perennial redefinition: a constant assembling and disassembling of the exogamous unit in a continuous renegotiation of the fluidity of individual and collective identity. The vision is, of course, hilariously underscored in the final sequence of the film by the egalitarian heterodoxy of the international *ménage-à-trois*, which, in individual terms, unites triumphantly the "nationally" disparate characters of Estrella and Miquel and even ultimately allows the inclusive salvation of that most recalcitrant of chauvinists, Maurice the petomane.

Notes

1. Marvin D'Lugo is minded, somewhat perilously, to locate this "renegotiation" of the autochthonous personality within the ambit of postcolonial discourse, which tends to intellectualize what is both for Bigas Luna and his characters a very physical experience ("*La teta i la lluna*: The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain" 196–214). Paul Julian Smith perceptively flags the deficiency of this theoretical approach with pertinent reference to the actuality of political and academic debate surrounding Catalanism and its manipulation ("Between Land" 89–107).

2. The distinguished historian John Elliott was duly impressed by the depth of the "love of the *pàtria*" evident among Catalans in the early seventeenth century whose self-critical spirit he also perceives in the present-day context ("In Search of 1640").

3. The qualificatives are those habitually applied to this politico-cultural doctrine and are taken from the section on *Noucentisme* in Joan Fuster's seminal study *Literatura catalana contemporània* (143–64).

4. For more information about the nature of prewar Catalanism and the emergence of CiU, see Andrew Dowling, "The Reconstitution of Political Catalanism 1939–75" (17–25). A more complete historical study of the importance of culture in this context is provided by Borja de Riquer, *Història: Política, societat i cultura dels Països Catalans*, with a general historical overview being offered by Albert Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present*.

5. It should also not go unnoticed that it is precisely the Right that has consistently proved to be the enemy of autonomy domestically. On key occasions in the course of the last century, the Catalan bourgeoisie offered its self-interested support to the military coups of Primo de Rivera and Franco.

6. For further information about the legendary petomane, see F. Caradec and Jean Nohain, *Le Pétomane au Moulin-Rouge*. A biography of Joseph Pujol may be found online at http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~lofty/pujol.htm and http://www.suitcase.net/pujol.html, with information about Leonard Rossiter at http://members.netscapeonline.co.uk/pf757/lr/index.htm.

7. As any long-serving conservative first minister, Pujol has been the butt of many an artistic send-up both at home and abroad. A further example of such raucous disrespect would be his protagonism in the Joglars's hilarious reworking of the Alfred Jarry classic, *Ubu President*.

8. For a full account of the *Kulturkampf*, see the relevant chapter in A. Terry, *Catalan Literature* and also his "Catalan Literary *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme*" (55–57).

9. In literary terms the indelicacy of corporality is frequently evoked by the proletarian naive poet Joan Salvat-Papasseit (1894–1924); the scatological dimension to the output of Salvador Dalí's would also be typical of this alternative "renegade" impulse.

10. "Pròleg" to *Versos bruts* (xi–xxxiv).

11. The seminal works of Bakhtin in this area are, of course, *Rabelais and His World* and *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

11

Genre and Screen Violence
Revisiting *Tesis*
(Alejandro Amenábar, 1995)

Barry Jordan

Introduction

As Jeffrey Sconce has argued, most contemporary mainstream film horror tends to be dismissed by the critical establishment as mindless, juvenile garbage, with the subgenre of the psycho/slasher movie coming in for particular vituperation. Critical derision is heaped not only on offending film texts but also on their mainly teen audiences, usually dismissed as spotty, retarded nerds whose brains have been addled by too much exposure to excessive screen violence and gore, as exemplified by classic series such as the *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* cycles (Sconce, "Spectacles of Death" 103–06; "Trashing the Academy" 371–74). If Hollywood teen horror is widely frowned upon, 1990s spoof horror, grisly comic parodies and exploitation-gore fare "made in Spain" tend to attract similar sniffiness and scorn (Rabalska 91–93; Triana-Toribio 155). Among such Hispanic horror hybrids, we find *Killer Barbys* (Jess Franco, 1996), *La lengua asesina* (Alberto Sciamma, 1997), *Sólo se muere dos veces* (Estéban Ibarretxe, 1996), *Aquí llega Condemor* (Angel Sáenz de Heredia, 1996), as well as *Airbag* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1997), *Acción mutante* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1992*), El Día de la Bestia* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1995), *Perdita Durango* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1997), Santiago Segura's *Torrente 1*

Fig. 11. Ana Torrent as Angela in *Tesis*. Courtesy of Sogecine.

& 2 (1997 and 1999; see Jordan, "Spain's New Cinema"), as well as the kind of "cine fantaterror" produced by the Fantasy Factory of Barcelona, financed by Filmax (see Heredero and Santamarina, *Semillas* 70).

By contrast, Amenábar's *Tesis* (1995) has been received very differently by a small but growing number of reviewers and critics at home and abroad (see, for example, Sempere 115–20; Hills 1–3). The film is yet another variation on the discredited psycho-slasher movie, yet it has attracted a growing amount of favorable critical attention, with reviewers and scholars positively engaged by its disturbing subject matter and tone and the sheer virtuosity of its undergraduate director (Amenábar was a twenty-three-year old, final-year student, when he made *Tesis* in 1995). Lacking the visual spectacle and graphic violence beloved of gore and grue fans, *Tesis* is the sort of horror or horror thriller which, while able to attract young mainstream audiences, also appeals to groups beyond those of the teen generation. Compared to the ultraviolence, explicit gore, and hip heavy metal soundtracks of its American and Spanish cousins, *Tesis* has been seen as combining the commercial appeal of American horror aesthetics with the "intellectual" gravitas of the European art film (see Amenábar himself in Payán 45; Allinson 327; and Wayne). Indeed, given its university setting and campus characters and the fact that it explicitly addresses issues of compulsive voyeurism and the horror gaze, extreme screen violence, the confusion of the fictional diegesis with "reality," and the ways in which the media mediate and control our lives, *Tesis* is highly attractive to reviewers, critics, academics, and cinefiles, as well as art-house aficionados. That is, a largely university-educated, elite, cine-

literate audience. But, as Sconce asks of a film such as *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton [1986/1990]), why would an educated, elite audience make serial killing and screen violence a worthy premise for close attention and debate ("Spectacles of Death" 104)? This question arguably underpins Amenábar's debut feature and raises key issues on various fronts, two of which I intend to explore in this chapter.

The first is that of generic definition. Is *Tesis* a (psycho) thriller à la Hitchcock, a horror thriller, a slasher movie, a form of realist horror, or a type of postmodern horror, as Hills has argued (see Hills; Neale 92–99)? Hills sees *Tesis* as concerned with the collapse of knowledge boundaries and with the delegitimation of traditional forms of academic authority and expertise. He suggests this because the film appears to stage confrontations between more conventional, institutionalized forms of academic knowledge and other marginal, stigmatized forms of expertise such as horror fandom, as revealed in clashes between Angela and Chema and Angela and Castro. Does *Tesis* involve the apparent dissolution of boundaries between academic and fan expertise, while partially rehabilitating the latter? Or does it appear to counsel an even deeper cynicism toward authority, various forms of expertise (institutional and marginal), and to the truth of media representations (See Smith, *The Others*, Collins, and Maxwell)?

Second, the lethal subject matter of *Tesis* is of course the snuff movie, whose combination of graphic sexual violence, prolonged torture, murder, and dismemberment of female victims by male psychopaths occupies a unique position at the very extremity of screen pornography. Given the continuing uncertainty over the purported real existence of snuff, how does *Tesis* develop its snuff tradition and aesthetic? And how does this fictionalized rendering of an apochryphal film form and tradition relate to Amenábar's critique of contemporary media saturation, mediation, and media effects (which locates snuff on the same noxious continuum as the television reality show)? Before looking at these questions in more detail, I propose to describe briefly the cultural and filmic contexts from which *Tesis* emerged.

Contexts

Tesis did not appear out of nowhere but emerged from a specific confluence of factors linked to changes taking place in Spanish filmmaking in the early 1990s. In broad terms, the literary adaptations, historical dramas, and political films that had been supported by the Miró reforms in the 1980s as "quality cinema," apart from a few exceptions, failed to attract

commercial audiences or to generate viable box office revenues (see Jordan). This led to serious financial difficulties by the end of the decade, with both government and professional associations acutely concerned with producing commercially viable, appealing films, able to attract audiences as well as regenerate the industry. In the early 1990s, new forms of film narrative, style, and thematics began to emerge, initially from a group of new directors of Basque origin such as Enrique Urbizu, Juanma Bajo Ulloa, Julio Medem, and Alex de la Iglesia. Films such as *Todo por la pasta* (Urbizu, 1991), *Acción mutante* (de la Iglesia, 1992), *Alas de mariposa* (Bajo Ulloa, 1992), and *Vacas* (Medem, 1992) opened the way to a growing influx of younger film professionals into the industry, many of whom were determined to reconnect with younger audiences (hitherto a relatively neglected sector) by reinventing the popular (mainly American) genre film (see Kinder, "Introduction" to *Refiguring Spain*). These developments were helped by certain legislative changes (such as the Ley 17/1994, *Protección y Fomento de la Cinematografía*), which sought to attract new directors into the industry by offering production subsidies and development monies. Within this more positive context, in 1994, a twenty-two-year-old Amenábar (in his fourth year at Madrid's Complutense University) was invited by veteran director José Luis Cuerda to make his first main feature. By chance, Cuerda had seen Amenábar's prize-winning video short *Himenóptero* (1992), intending to assess the performance of a student actress but was mightily impressed by Amenábar's assured narrative skill and directorial ability in the thriller mode. (*Himenóptero* was Amenábar's second short. He had already made *La cabeza*, in 1991, with classmate Mateo Gil). As a result, Cuerda and producer Emiliano Otegui undertook to create from scratch a new "cooperative" production company, called *Las Producciones del Escorpión*, to make films by newcomers, beginning with Amenábar's first full-length feature, *Tesis* (see Borau 264–65; and the final chapter on snuff of Gubern's *La imagen pornográfica*, for the inspiration behind the film's subject matter).

The overall budget for *Tesis* was approximately 120 million pesetas, benefitting from a 45 million peseta government subsidy from ICAA, with the rest of the money provided mostly by distributor advances (Sogepaq, which handled international distribution, contributed 50 million and the American distributor, UIP, 12 million). The remaining 12 to 13 million pesetas came from the director and members of the crew, who invested in the venture by taking only half of their salary and, in the case of Amenábar himself, much less. These "socios" included the second unit head (Julio Madurga), the sound engineers (Goldstein and Steinberg), the art director (the famous Hans Burmann), and editor (María Elena

Sáenz de Rozas), as well as Amenábar himself, all of whom became coproducers. The actors (mostly untried) were paid minimal rates, apart from the better-known child star Ana Torrent—invariably remembered for her role as Ana in *El espiritu de la colmena* (Erice, 1973), who played Angela, and veteran Xavier Elorriaga, as Castro. The film was in many ways a truly collective enterprise, with director, actors, and crew risking their own money (Vera 24–25; see also Perriam on Eduardo Noriega and Fele Martínez 174–85).

An exhaustive summer shooting schedule began in 1995, in mid-August, for five to six weeks, using locations in the Faculties of Ciencias de la Información and Farmacia, at Madrid's Complutense University. The team worked twelve hours per day, five days a week, and five hours on Saturdays (Vera 25). Guided though not overwhelmed by Cuerda and veteran camera operator Hans Burmann, a nervous Amenábar generated a massive number of shots each day (sometimes twenty-five to thirty set-ups), including repeats, consuming huge amounts of raw film and thereby exceeding tight budgetary constraints. This generated a rough cut of near epic proportions. Mateo Gil suggests a first edit of almost two hours, forty minutes, which was finally whittled down to 125 minutes (Vera 33–35). Amenábar himself has also talked about the inordinate length of the shooting script, the oversupply of narrative red herrings, false trails, surprises—in other words, the totally unwieldy excess of story material, which had to be ruthlessly filleted at the editing stage (Heredero, *Espejo de miradas* 106–07; Rodríguez Marchante 50–53).

As I have argued elsewhere (Jordan, "Spain's New Cinema"), Spanish film history, especially that of the 1990s, is littered by debutant directors whose first feature films either fail to get a release or fall below the radar of public and critical awareness because of poor or null distribution strategies and improvised exhibition campaigns (see Brown, 1999). Though usually acclaimed as a great commercial and critical success in Spain in its day, Amenábar's *Tesis* was by no means an immediate hit. Rather the opposite. Indeed, the modicum of positive international recognition achieved by the film's screening at the Berlin Film Festival in February 1996 would have benefited from a simultaneous commercial opening in Spain. This did not happen since the production company (via Otegui) was unhappy with the film's distributor for Spain (UIP) over its choice of cinema circuit in which to release *Tesis*, fearing the film would die within a week in inappropriate locales (Vera 45). Hence, the two-month wait until April 20, 1996, the film's official release date, during which time Otegui arranged an alternative theatrical release. Meanwhile, a young, by now twenty-four-year-old, first-time filmmaker, encouraged by a positive but extremely expensive visit to Germany, toured radio

and television stations in Spain trying to maintain a still meagre level of public awareness for the film.

Released in April 1996, in seventeen cinemas in Madrid and three in Barcelona (see Vera 45; Palacio and Cortell 965), *Tesis* ended the year in Madrid in only one art-house circuit, the salas Renoir. Initial box-office results were disappointing ("solamente satisfactorios," Palacio and Cortell 965), despite presales of 100 million pesetas (Payán 45). However, by word of mouth in Madrid, *Tesis* began to attract a certain cult status among nocturnal student audiences, and by December 1996 had managed to gross 130 million pesetas, attracting approximately 250,000 spectators over the year (Vera 46). However, all this would change by the end of the following year, in the wake of the film's remarkable and unexpected success at the 1997 Goyas. Nominated for eight awards, *Tesis* won seven (including best film, best young director, best script, and best new actor). Such emphatic national recognition and the ensuing publicity allowed the producers to practically relaunch the film, hitting a far wider and more diverse market, far beyond its already secure appeal to Spain's new, elite, educated, art-house, younger audiences. This led to its quite unprecedented success in the home video market and a much more self-confident and effective rerelease campaign in most Spanish cities, which capitalized on official Goya successes. By the end of 1997, *Tesis* had made more than 200 million pesetas and was on its way to becoming a substantial success. By 2002, *Tesis* had also been distributed in more than forty countries, though, as Amenábar is at pains to point out, over its screen career, the film has done far better abroad than at home (Payán 45).

Genre: Thriller, Horror, and the Postmodern

Amenábar himself has defined *Tesis* as a "thriller urbano y juvenil" (Sempere 78), whose novelty resides in the insertion of a sophisticated investigation plot, led by students, within a university context. Christine A. Buckley also adopts the term "thriller" but widens its scope to that of "horror thriller," a hybrid term that acknowledges the incorporation into the film of a monstrous threat (the serial killer: is it Bosco or Chema?) and narrative elements of the slasher movie subgenre (8). Here, Buckely draws extensively on Carol Clover's feminist work on the slasher film (1992), notably the figure of the final girl (Angela) who, while not sexually active, is active in the investigation plot and finally tracks down and defeats the killer. Leora Lev also regards Angela as a "likely candidate for final girl status" ("Tesis [Critical Essay]" 36; "Returns of the Repressed" 168). However, while both Buckley and Lev appear to accept Clover's contention that the slasher movie assumes dominant male agency (even

if via the final girl figure) and masculine norms of spectatorship, Isabel Pinedo sees the subgenre as providing an imaginary scenario in which women fight back with lethal force against male aggressors and win. As such, the slasher movie can also be seen to appeal to female spectators while inducing significant anxiety in men (*Recreational Terror* 85).

As a type of "horror thriller/slasher movie," *Tesis* thus connects with trends in post-1960s horror, fundamentally redefined by Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The latter located the monstrous in the "ordinary" modern psyche (Norman Bates) and linked horror with the psychological thriller, thereby helping to inspire the slasher, stalker, and serial killer movies of the 1970s, '80s and '90s.

As Carter and Weaver have suggested, the dominance of the violent action genre of the 1980s (in the *Alien* and *Terminator* series, as well as in the latter stages of the *Rocky* and *Rambo* cycles, for example) gave way in the 1990s to the serial killer genre and "a new wave of designer violence" (65). There emerged extremely graphic images of violence seemingly devoid of motivation, effects, or moral frameworks. Tarantino's rise to directorial fame, for example, in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *True Romance* (1993), and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) no doubt responded in part to his hip aestheticization of screen violence, usually set to catchy pop music tracks. Many other films, such as *Man Bites Dog* (Rémy Belvaux, 1992), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1992), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994; based on a Tarantino script), *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1996), and most notoriously *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986/1990) also seemed to indulge in overly visceral screen violence, heavily sexualized, with an emphasis on seemingly pointless, often narcissistic and sadistic, brutalism. In the face of public criticism concerning the "effects" of such imagery and its apparent legitimation of perverse sexual gratification, directors defended their movies not as shameless commercial fare, but as serious, knowing, often parodic treatments of media exploitation of violence and public fears of crime and disorder (witness the future in the UK over the case of Cronenberg's *Crash* [see Creed]). In other quarters, such movies were said to reflect a certain postmodern temperament, one in which "postmodern horror constructs an unstable, open-ended universe in which categories collapse, violence constitutes everyday life, and the irrational prevails" (Pinedo, "Recreational Terror" 29). Postmodern horror, in this guise, thus acknowledged the dissolution of dominant ideologies and, as the body counts rose, it also seemed to tap into millenial anxieties of apocalyptic proportions (as seen, for example, in Alex de la Iglesia's *El Día de la Bestia*, 1995).

To what extent does Amenábar's *Tesis* ride this 1990s wave of slasher/serial killer savagery and screen violence? Is it necessarily antagonistic to dominant ideologies, do its depictions of violence seem

meaningless and unmotivated, disconnected from wider social and political ideologies? Does this make it a form of postmodern horror and, if so, of what kind? These are not straightforward questions and arguably demand far deeper examination than can be given here. As Andrew Tudor has pointed out, the trouble with the notion of postmodern horror is its lack of precision since nearly all of those qualities seen as distinctively postmodern (as articulated above by Pinedo, for example) seem to have been exploited in earlier horror films: extreme violence, a sense of overriding danger, irrationality, rage and terror, social upheaval, as well as the more conventional features of the blurring of ideological and discursive boundaries, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, lack of narrative closure, etc. (Tudor, "From Paranoia" 105). Moreover, as Tudor also argues, the appeal of horror films is perhaps less that of tapping into deep-seated unconscious fears and desires than a set of fictional elements that resonate strongly "with features of the social experiences of its consumers" ("Why Horror?" 460), by which he means a social reality that is increasingly unreliable, untrustworthy, and where the authorities cannot protect the social order. Hence Tudor's distinction between "secure" and "paranoid" horror, the former achieving some degree of narrative closure and the containment of the threat while the latter is characterized, among other things, by a total collapse of authority and expertise and a more open ending. Tudor links this notion of paranoid horror not to postmodern discourse per se, but to Beck's idea of the "risk society" (see Beck, Jay) and to Giddens's account of the lack of trust and security in "high" or "late-modern" societies (88; see also Lupton 170–71).

In an extension of these ideas, Matt Hills has shown that we can justifiably connect the notion of "risk" horror to postmodern horror by acknowledging the anxieties and fears of risk society. However, in the process, Hills argues, we do not need to dismiss altogether the notions of authority and expertise (3). Authority, in postmodern horror, says Hills, is not fatally undermined but becomes multiple, dispersed, contested, and conflictual. Hence, his reading of *Tesis* in terms of the clash between academic/institutional knowledge and horror fan knowledge or expertise. Hills admits that both sets of knowledge interact profoundly in the film and feed off one another, while in a number of instances neither can be fully believed or trusted, thus reinforcing the paranoid horror component. Yet his aim is to show that fan knowledge can be a means toward character empowerment in the face of danger and is thus to some extent validated by the film's narrative development and outcome.

In broad terms, I agree with much of Hill's thesis, including the idea that Chema's fan expertise is positively valorized on the whole. However, while certainly readable as a postmodern parable based on the

delegitimation of authority and contestation of institutional knowledges, *Tesis* also shows signs of what Cynthia Freeland calls "realist horror." That is a horror thriller which, as noted in the earlier discussion on narrative, sets up a reasonably credible, diegetic world, creates terror and unease, promises but largely witholds and denies the spectacle of violence, and contains ordinary rather than fictitious monsters (128; see also Black 2002). At the same time, *Tesis* is profoundly self-reflexive and metacinematic in that, through Angela's experiences of both screen and "real" violence as victim, the film seeks to make a serious point about why we are attracted to the imagery of violence and death. *Tesis* thus comments internally not only on the sombre issue of our sadistic voyeurism but on the regimes of representation that purport to deliver to us the "truth" of our desired images of violence, murder, and death via snuff. At the same time, the film also manages to combine a paranoid horror framing (via Angela), involving the collapse of trust and certainty in a "risk" society, while at the same time proclaiming a kind of "happy ending" and a classical narrative closure. In other words, the film exploits elements of both paranoid and secure horror conventions in the same narrative. These are mainly to do with the dynamics of character development in the movie and the outcome of the investigation plot, but they also hinge on our reading of the "double ending," and the extent to which we regard this combination as open or closed, which I discuss later.

As regards character, in his lecture on the Spanish film industry, Professor Castro (in fact, the real name of the tutor who failed Amenábar in his direction course) powerfully articulates Spain's need to compete with mainstream Hollywood cinema by giving audiences what they want. In his supervision interview with Angela, and in the face of her objections, he reiterates the same populist, commercial mantra—that in order to build up the national industry, the market must rule, and spectacle, libidinal intensity, and affect in Spanish filmmaking must take priority over any artistic, creative, or moral agenda. That is, the consumer must be king and given what he/she craves, including the whole spectrum of screen sex and violence. Ironically, Castro's market-driven credo has been vigorously endorsed by none other than Amenábar himself in numerous interviews (see, for example, Payán 45; Heredero, *Espejo de miradas* 89). Yet, as part of his "ajuste de cuentas" with the Spanish University system, Amenábar's film version of Castro portrays him not only as a populist demagogue but also as a secret producer and peddler of snuff. In other words, he is an aspiring commercial filmmaker "manqué" (note the aspirational Oscar statue in his office and the photograph of James Bond on his desk). Castro yearns for artistic and commercial recognition, it seems, while channeling his inner rage into the parasitical exploitation

and murder of his own students (see Schneider). Also, beneath the respectable pose of academic and media psychologist, Castro is something of a failed artist and a totally corrupted university professional. His scholarly authority and pursuit of truth have been perverted; he has become an evangelist for "bread and circuses." His intellectual detachment has been replaced by a vicious, neocapitalist entrepreneurialism, driven by envy and a sadistic fascination with violence, sensationalism, and spectacle, expressed through the snuff conspiracy he organizes. And though not directly involved in the killings himself (except when he tries to eliminate Angela), he edits the snuff tapes made by his students in the cavernous depths of the university. He thus represents the collapse of academic and moral authority, the corruption of scholarly expertise, and the embrace of the media free market (as a supplier of snuff, whose production and storage are nonetheless protected by CCTV video surveillance).

Angela Márquez seems an unlikely figure for a student who is writing a thesis on the effects on the family of "audio-visual violence," in its crudest and most repellent forms. Why the inclusion of the "family" in her thesis title? She appears to have no personal or political axe to grind, given her outwardly stable and secure middle-class family background in Madrid. This aspect is left somewhat undeveloped. Also, despite the approval of her thesis outline by her benign first supervisor, Professor Figueroa, Angela seems unusually reticent to press her friendly mentor on his views and fails to articulate any research questions at all. She thus appears to lack even the most basic academic inquisitiveness. In consultation with her new supervisor, Professor Castro, who takes over when Figueroa dies, Castro's critique of her vagueness and superficiality on the matter of screen violence is as devastating as it is cruel and sadistic. Here, Amenábar arguably softens his critique of Spanish academics by contrasting the kindly and helpful Figueroa (representative of an older generation) with the aggressive demolition of Angela's project by Castro, clearly flagging up Castro as a potential narrative obstacle and villain as well as an ideological maverick.

Angela is no fan of her subject; indeed, she is profoundly squeamish and cannot look directly at images of violence, having to impose a form of self-censorship by following the sound track only or covering her eyes when watching the snuff video with Chema. Yet she seems a little too surprised by the nature of the depravity she contemplates on video—too innocent, too lacking in cynicism and guile perhaps to be a totally credible proxy for the spectator. Obviously, Amenábar's aim here is to present an everywoman character who is just starting out on research in a taboo area (a filmic alter ego for Amenábar himself? See Rodríguez Marchante 51). Narratively, Angela plays the innocent, as yet untutored,

vulnerable "final girl" with whom both young males and females in the audience can readily identify (Clover 5). Yet she displays little in the way of final girl knowledge, though she is able to research Vanessa's murder in the newspaper archive and steal information from the Sony camera shop. Angela's cultural intertexts are "high cultural" forms: she accompanies her studies with music by Händel on her Walkman compared to Chema's grungy death metal. And, beneath the respectable cultural and institutional veneer, Angela's positioning as a bona fide research student, coupled with her thesis subject, provide the perfect cover for her to watch as much screen violence as she can stomach, in the name of the pursuit of truth and scholarly disinterestedness, which she intones on several occasions (Vera 106). Yet her apparent lack of scruples as a witness to Figueroa's death (she steals the offending tape rather than alert the police and ambulance services), suggests a strangely obsessive, voyeuristic impulse to experience for herself the material that has apparently caused his death. So, do Angela's protestations of academic detachment act as a veil of respectability for darker, more disturbing impulses? Is her focus on the "audio" element of the snuff soundtrack rather than the image a certain form of fetishized reception/consumption; is she "turned on" by the screams of the snuff victims rather than by the graphic, gory imagery of their mutilated bodies? At the very least, Angela's motives for studying screen violence are mixed. Her fascination with violent imagery and death appears motivated by something far more deep-seated and personal, perhaps even linked to her own family background, as suggested in her thesis title and in her curiously masochistic, erotic dream of coupling with Bosco.

If Angela is figured as the epitome of the naïve, non-fan, research student, Chema is the experienced, video-hardened, horror geek. This is evident in his look, dress, hygiene, taste in music, and attitude to work. Lean, unwashed, unhealthy, surviving on junk food, greasy, long-haired, with his horn-rimmed spectacles, heavy metal fandom, messy and chaotic lifestyle (as are his lecture notes and flat, unlike his neatly catalogued collection of violent videos), above all Chema is the archetypal student loner, marginalized from the mainstream, friendless and geeky, a weird and wholly unattractive example of the male gender. This opposition between disreputable Chema and respectable Angela is cleverly captured by Amenábar in an early scene that effectively establishes character outline with alternating (and dryly humorous) point-of-view shots.

On adopting Angela's POV (Point of View) on freaky Chema, we as viewers tune in to her classical music (Händel on her Walkman, plus a spotless set of lecture notes); when the soundtrack cuts to the horror fan's audio feed and thus his POV on Angela, we get his death metal music

and a page of chaotic doodles, scribbles, and erasures. The clash of fan and non-fan is thus articulated not only via a gender divide (between damaged, youthful masculinity and deeply troubled femininity) but also by a collision of cultural and subcultural profiles, where Angela's mainstream academic cultural capital (symbolized by her thesis and musical tastes) is counterposed to Chema's stigmatized horror fan expertise. The clash between Händel and heavy metal neatly symbolizes a wider struggle for legitimacy between opposing forms of student knowledge and authority. Yet, in the murder investigation carried out by Angela and Chema, *Tesis* also shows these forms of expertise working together in order to solve the mystery of Figueroa's death and Vanessa's disappearance and murder. That such knowledges are combined at all, however, relies on Angela's intellectual dependency on Chema's collection of violent videos (to which she needs access) and his technical knowledge of video filmmaking.

It is at the level of the investigation plot where Chema's fan knowledge (or more precisely his technical expertise) provides the first big investigative breakthrough when he spots the telltale signs of the XT500 in the snuff video through its use of the digital zoom, its grainy texture, and the edits that obscure the identity of the murderer. Soon after, Angela spots Bosco using the same model of camera in the cafeteria on his girlfriend Yolanda, a scene whose gender and power relations uncannily echo the snuff mise-en-scène and cue the viewer to imagine Angela's own likely involvement as Bosco's snuff victim later on. Yet Hills suggests that Chema's fan expertise is largely confined to the private sphere of his huge flat, bequeathed by his grandmother, an internal, enclosed, and claustrophobic space, littered with the bric-a-brac of the horror freak and his private collection of extra-strong porn and "mondo" videos. Here I would add that, narratively, there are signs that Chema's interest in extreme videos goes rather wider. In order to get access to and check out the library stacks and passageways, Chema also offers to trade porn to the university security guards. They refer to him jokingly as "Freddy Krueger," a direct citation from the *Nightmare* series. In other words, the guards provide a clue that links Chema with a well-known fictional serial killer. This not only appears to implicate him in the distribution of tapes made by the snuff ring operating in the university. It also identifies him as a potential murderer of Vanessa. Chema, then, is not only the filmic embodiment of fan knowledge and expertise, as Hills argues (5). Nor is he simply the locus of "pure" critical reasoning, as Moreiras-Menor argues (256). He is also flagged up to the viewer as the potential stalker, murderer, and author of the snuff movies, especially when he describes Bosco to Angela as "ese psicópata," as if

deflecting responsibility from himself. (He is right, of course, but Angela is maybe too dim or distracted by Bosco to believe him.) As in the case of Castro, these strongly marked and sustained ambiguities suggest no simple binary contest between legitimate and illegitimate academic and fan knowledges (in a sense, Castro has let his artistic and "fan" impulses get the better of him), or between fan and non-fan expertise, embodied in the student characters. In *Tesis*, and as befits a classically constructed thriller inspired by Hitchcock, the viewer is kept guessing as long as possible. Boundaries and notions of authority collapse, moral frameworks melt away, character roles, identities, and motivations become deliberately obscure and unsettled, often reassigned to other characters (for example, Bosco initiates his own investigation plot as a counter to Angela's research on Vanessa) in order to maximize suspense and uncertainty until the end. In emphasizing the relativism of his narrative world and the profound vulnerability (self-imposed?) of his heroine, Amenábar tries as best he can to keep us guessing over the identity of the killer.

Tesis and *Snuff*

The disturbing premise of *Tesis* is that the Faculty of Ciencias de la Comunicación, Sección de Imagen, at Madrid's Complutense University, is harboring a snuff movie production and distribution conspiracy. A center of higher education and learning, of academic knowledge and scholarly investigation, has at its very core a snuff operation designed to commercialize the perverted extremes of pornography, sexual violence, and female exploitation. But what do we mean by "snuff" and how does *Tesis* approach its putative audio-visual quarry? As Kerekes and Slater have shown (7–8), the term "snuff" has been variously linked to the alleged filming of the Charles Manson murders, "mondo" shock documentaries on video (such as the *Faces of Death* series), and an Argentinian exploitation flick of the early 1970s (*Slaughter*), which became transformed into the notorious film *Snuff* (1975). If the latter gave currency to the term, promising the actual filmed murder of one of the film crew, *Snuff* was little more than an elaborate hoax, a fiction film simulating rather than actually recording violent death. All of which raises the question of whether snuff actually exists. Amenábar himself has no doubt that such material is extant and available, arguing that examples can be found from the United States, Canada, Finland, Switzerland, and Sweden and can be defined as "a movie genre that consists in torturing, executing, and chopping up a victim, while filming the entire process. It is hardly

known in Spain, although rumor has it that snuff movies with animals have been made. Snuff represents the extreme of audiovisual violence; it is the outmost degeneration of gore movies" (Sempere 77).

In an early sequence of *Tesis*, Chema shows Angela (at her request) examples of "screen violence" (in fact, a simulation of the "mondo" documentary compilation *Faces of Death*, which is retitled *Fresh Blood*, dealing with scenes of death in combat, mangled accident victims, autopsies, etc.). Here Amenábar seeks to acknowledge and present to the audience something approaching a snuff tradition, something equivalent to pornography, which he calls "snuff blando" (Sempere 77). Gradually, throughout *Tesis* he connects this soft version with his own artistic recreation of illegal "snuff duro," involving recorded images of the (simulated) slow, agonizing, murder and cutting up of faculty student Vanessa. Amenábar's "thesis" on screen violence, introduced here, suggests that exposure to "mondo"-type actuality material (real or staged) can create in the viewer an appetite for ever stronger and more violent imagery, leading inexorably to a waning of affect and snuff junkiedom. Moreover, such extreme material reinforces the link between snuff and aberrant male voyeurism, sadism, and rape, enacted in the snuff scenario, where the phallic camera/photographic image functions as a tool of gratification as well as an incitement to male sexual violence and eventually sexual murder.

In the absence of any extant examples of snuff, a number of commercial features have imaginatively laid down the parameters of a popular snuff aesthetic. These range from Michael Powell's pioneering pre-snuff *Peeping Tom* (1960), arguably a strong intertext for *Tesi*s (particularly in the physical and psychic parallels between the young "directors" Mark and Bosco Herranz) as well as *Hardcore* (Paul Schrader, 1978), *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1982), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986/1990), and *Man Bites Dog* (Rémy Belvaux, 1992). Snuff conventions would appear to include: a hidden, enclosed, dingy space (usually one room); a single camera with black-and-white, grainy film, but sometimes color; the absence of sound; camera operator as murderer; the long take; minimal editing; specialist/taboo material; greater ease of dissemination thanks to video technology; an extremely expensive commodity. At the extremity of the exploitation flick, snuff has emerged in many disguised versions in mainstream commercial cinema (recently, for example, Joel Schumacher's *8MM*, 1999), primarily via the route of horror cinema and the serial killer/slasher subgenre.

Within *Tesis*, snuff is represented as lethal both for the murder victims (such as Vanessa) and for certain types of nonspecialist, nonhabituated viewer. Indeed, Angela's first thesis supervisor, the aging, amiable, and asthmatic Figueroa (a cameo played by director Gonzalo Suárez), is

found dead in a viewing theatre after watching a snuff movie, which he picked up and played by accident, it seems. Whether Figueroa's death is accidental (due to a heart attack, arising from his asthma) or deliberate (murdered to ensure the continued secrecy and viability of the snuff production ring?) is left unresolved.

Perversely fascinated by snuff and attracted by the reality of Figueroa's death, Angela removes the lethal tape from the screening room for further scrutiny, but is physically unable to contemplate its imagery because of her anticipation of disgust and anxiety. In order to consume it in the privacy and safety of her parent's home, she has to turn down the contrast on the television set to full while taking in only the soundtrack. Her first exposure to a "real" snuff film is thus via the audio track only, through the chilling screams and futile entreaties of a helpless and as yet unidentified torture victim. The use of zoom closeups on Angela's face, synchronized with identical shots of the blank television screen, set up an interplay of attraction and repulsion, already seen in the opening sequence at the train station and a dynamic that is repeated regularly throughout the film. At other times, unable to absorb the visual and aural totality of the snuff tape and its images of mutilation and death, Angela will listen only to the recorded sound through her earphones, thus making an audio (imaginary) rather than real visual connection/identification between looker and victim. As a defense mechanism in the face of overstimulation, it is only this act of self-censorship that allows Angela to repeat the viewing of the tape alongside Chema. His own very different reaction to the tape is to mockingly repeat the cries of the victim, as might be usual in watching a mainstream, commercial horror film.

On this second viewing, Angela can barely watch. But this time, she has to absorb not only the victim's screams but also Chema's sadistic verbal commentary. Indeed, Chema teases Angela and dares her to look while ordering her to do the precise opposite. The sequence closes with a savage and darkly humorous jump cut from Chema's mouth crammed with crisps to Angela leaning over the toilet vomiting. Visual and bodily consumption/expulsion are aligned here visually, while two very different modes of snuff consumption are suggested, corresponding to female/male, nonaficionado/fan, nonspecialist/specialist. Finally, Angela cannot repress any longer the desire to look and does so through her fingers. Shots of Angela as reluctant voyeur (but impelled to see the video) are intercut with snippets of on-screen snuff material. Brief fragments of classic snuff mise-en-scène (terrified, hapless, female victim, tied to chair, middle of garage, screaming as masked cam operator/tormentor punches and bludgeons her) and camera positioning (medium shots, static cam) suggest a scene of violence, torture, and pornographic sadism. But here, as before,

the soundtrack takes precedence over the image, with the chainsaw and the final execution shot being amplified, as the raw, "realistic," uncut sounds of death, confirming Angela's worst fears. According to snuff conventions, elements of directness, realism, immediacy, pure access to the scene of sexual torture and murder appear to override any editing, delay, or narrative niceties. Until, that is, Chema notices a certain graininess in the image and imperceptible cuts in the flow.

Though it presents snuff material only as a set of brief, intercut snippets, *Tesis* approaches the subgenre initially as a direct, filmed record of agonizing sexual torment, torture, and murder, and in order to explore its contours locates Angela at the heart of the film, as our main identification figure and mediation of its issues (see Corner, *The Art of Record* 17–22). Her fascination with such material is connected to her own compulsive voyeurism (her curiosity about horrific death) and her fatal attraction to Bosco (Eduardo Noriega), which is underpinned by a strongly masochistic impulse. Indeed, in several scenes (in the faculty building, at home having dinner, and in her bedroom), their interaction is organized almost exactly according to the structuring principles of the snuff movie (as in the video interview sequence in the canteen, which chillingly restages and reverses classic "snuff" roles and power relations between agressor and victim). In a dream sequence, Angela's masochism is taken much further as she licks from Bosco's hand the blood of the knife that he holds to her throat, as they kiss and prepare for intercourse (echoing an otherwise clichéd "horror" convention, reminiscent of classic Nosferatu/Dracula/vampire scenes). In another moment of masochistic desire, she is also driven to caress an image of Bosco on the television screen, bedazzled by the lure of this visual stimulation. And as if impelled by a bizarre desire for self-punishment, given her fascination for Bosco's perversions and the snuff scenario, Angela almost appears to seek out her own oblivion as his "real" snuff victim. In a strange echo of Castro's split personality, the restraint and detachment she shows as the research student is gradually abandoned as she ignores warnings from Yolanda and Chema and almost seeks to embrace a secret "snuff" death at the hands of her dream lover, Bosco, "ese psicópata," according to Chema. Initially positioned as Angela's nemesis, Chema is the specialist horror fan, whose acts of consumption are kept secret. In similar fashion, Castro's production line of snuff movies, stored in the bowels of the faculty library, is also figured as a taboo, hidden, unofficial stash of recorded video death. And even Amenábar himself, in a moment of self-recognition and complicity in serving up snuff, is compelled to acknowledge his own potential involvement in the commodification of images of death by including his

name on the list of those who have been issued with an XT500 camera, stolen by Angela from the Sony camera shop.

As noted earlier, *Tesis* provides us with two endings—two final scenes—one that wraps up the investigative plot, and another, an epilogue, that contains Amenábar's editorial note regarding the mind-curdling effects of televisual consumption as well as the first signs of a possible romance between Angela and Chema. The penultimate scene has Angela manage to cut her bonds with the knife she carries for protection, wrestle the gun from Bosco, and kill him (repeating the earlier fight scene between Chema and Castro in the faculty passageways). Angela emerges as the surviving final girl who not only dispatches the serial killer, but also rescues Chema, the final fan boy. Resourceful, determined, and unafraid, Angela thus brings a satisfactory closure to the student-led investigation plot, though we see no signs of the police or the beginnings of any official murder inquiry.

In a reversal of conventional gender priorities, the final scene is set in a hospital ward where Chema (not Angela) is recovering from his ordeal. Angela visits and gives him a book, containing a written dedication. This scene neatly encapsulates Amenábar's critical attitude toward media power and the link between exploitation television (such as reality shows) and snuff movies, the one form seemingly located on the same continuum as the other, with both pandering to the same sadistic drives and voyeuristic impulses. To reinforce the idea of the lure of screen violence, an older patient in the bed next to Chema asks permission to turn on the television. Temporarily denying him his wish, Chema asks the "abuelo" (old man) to read him the dedication in the book that Angela has just given him. Distracted by the desire to watch the television screen, the man struggles to distinguish the dedication—"Te invito a un café" ("Would you like a cup of coffee?")—from all the other technical and editorial information on the same opening page. The implication is that too much television has a negative impact on basic literacy, that televisual culture is harmful to our relationship with the written word. Indeed, as Angela and Chema leave the ward, the "abuelo" becomes almost instantaneously hypnotized by television images, letting the book fall into his lap. And, echoing Angela's visual fixation on Bosco, the rest of the patients (proxies for the Spanish nation), are shown to be utterly riveted to the small screen, as the camera pans across their faces. Their attention has been captured by a news item dealing with the murder of media student Vanessa, framed by a warning that "las imágenes a continuación pueden herir la sensibilidad." The item is set in the context of a story about the discovery of the university snuff ring and Bosco's female victims, "las

chicas snuff" (an ironic echo of "las chicas Almodóvar" perhaps?). In the item, short clips of snuff material from the Vanessa tape are intercut with voice-overs. Once again, Amenábar denies the viewer access to the snuff material, though we see its effects on the faces of the hospital patients, all of whom are wholly entranced by what they see, seemingly transformed into automata (echoing yet another legendary horror classic, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920).

The irony here is that our conventional approach to snuff as an underground, illegitimate, taboo form of visual pleasure is reversed by its incorporation into a news/current affairs, public television format. And even though, on an editorial level, the program warns the viewer of the scabrous nature of the imagery and denounces its maker as sick and deranged, peak time television demands transmission of the snuff tape itself. Videotaped sexual murder is presented as public spectacle in the name of "public interest." Here, Amenábar suggests that the migration of snuff into mainstream television is merely the logical and inevitable outcome of a process of dumbing-down, ratings wars, collapse of standards, and the ubiquity of increasingly sensationalist and sexualized trash television output (for a counter view, see Smith, "Between Land"). Such programming decisions also chime fully with Professor Castro's credo to give the public exactly what it most desires, including snuff—the most extreme form of exploitation programming. The implication is that Spain's masses (as represented by the hospital patients) are becoming (or have already become) pathological voyeurs, hooked on exploitation material and an insatiable appetite for sexualized violence and gore. However, while Amenábar lays the blame squarely at the door of the program providers and media regulators, he also places a degree of responsibility on the viewer/consumer, whose uncritical habits of consumption help maintain this degrading situation. By exiting the hospital and refusing to view the snuff material, except via the reactions of the passively gazing patients, Angela and Chema appear to move beyond their prior fetishes and fixations. They exit the ward together as friends and—who knows?—possibly as lovers in the future. Angela will abandon her thesis and Chema may well reengage with society and get the girl he has always desired. Given the choice, they choose to walk away from morbid curiosity and screen violence, abjuring its attractions and thus offering a positive, empowered example of conscious rejection of violence to their fans in the audience. As Angela and Chema walk to the lift and turn away, *Tesis* concludes with a written health warning in red, advising the television viewers of the horrific snuff images about to be broadcast, images that the cinema audience is once again denied but which the young sleuths have managed to unearth and reveal. The issue of screen violence and its uncriti-

cal consumption now lies, it seems, not with *Tesis*'s student heroes and specialist consumers but with the broad mass of television viewers, both on and off screen.

Conclusion

Amenábar's oversimplistic epilogue concerning a society of television junkies, hypnotized by what they see, transformed into mindless automata, arguably owes more to horror film tradition than academically credible media sociology. The notion that images of sexualized violence have "effects" in a direct, linear, top-down manner, producing mindless acts of consumption bears little serious analysis. Equally, the notion of the slippery slope, beginning with soft-core material, which simply stokes up an appetite for stronger and more extreme images, including pornography and ultimately snuff, is hardly clear cut. Indeed, the wider indictment of the "effects" of rampant television commercialism, "telebasura," and sensationalist pap, as articulated by Castro, which stands accused of creating a society of infantilized, degraded, and illiterate audiences, is at the very least debatable, depending as it does on how we understand the notion of "mediation."

Cultural studies reminds us that mediation is a matter of symbolic exchange—in other words, the media do not simply supply symbols, which audiences and readerships receive and then consume, in a simple, unidirectional, fashion. Rather, viewers and readers invest in their acts of consumption their own symbolic resources, agendas, and modes of understanding, adding meaning, affect, and value to written and visual cues, such as words, images, cause-effect relationships, and character. In other words, rather than a property of media artifacts, meaning is contingent on situated acts of interpretation. This now widely accepted notion has decoupled forever any direct, unproblematic linkage between media artifacts and their assumed "influence" on consumers (Corner, *Critical Ideas* 99).

More problematically, the use of various sorts of sexual objectification linked to representations of violence in order to create viewer enjoyment also shows media influence working through pleasure. Sexual objectification and scenes of violence raise important issues to do with the domains of fantasy and desire and of real attitudes and behaviors (via the stimulation of affect, emotions, and desire, especially in pathological personalities; see the relevant entries in Rycroft's dictionary). The well-known tag line "Pornography is the theory, rape the practice" suggests an almost unequivocal and direct linkage between pornographic representations of

sexuality and psychosocial relations, though the nature and degree of such "effects" are hotly disputed. The gendered nature of the issue is not in doubt, given that in the majority of pornographic depictions the images are aimed at men and portray women in a narrow range of roles, such as whore, slut, slave, victim, etc. More problematic is when violence (implied or graphic) is introduced into the porn scenario, which tends to shift the representation well beyond any acceptable real-life practices in ways in which more conventional imagery tends not to do.

As Corner argues, there is a paradox in a situation where the widespread circulation of images of violence is allowed, whereas profound anxiety is shown about all images of explicit sexuality (*Critical Ideas* 104). But what are the pleasures of looking at violence? Violence provides "action values," says Corner, on which many narrative depictions (such as Westerns, adventure stories, thrillers, and crime stories) base their appeal; these are the dramatic and kinetic intensities obtained by watching physical activities where energy, size/scale, and spectacle are key elements in the depiction. Corner argues that it is important to come to terms with the fact that there is widespread enjoyment of depicted violence (violence as play) across many age and social groups. He proposes two useful terms: "turn on" and "turn off" violence—two ways in which depictions of violence might be differentiated. "Turn on" violence would seek primarily to give excitement by heightened action (from the chase, fight, raid, crash, etc.), as well as intensified character performance and spectacular visual effects (*Studying Media* 104). "Turn off" violence would seek to portray the violence within the moral framings of everyday life, while building into the viewing experience a certain degree of disturbance and distress; the viewer would be invited to engage in an ostensibly nonpleasurable form of looking, which might include shock and disgust. The aim would be to give the viewer a disturbing, even harrowing experience, as might emerge for instance from a staged depiction of physical torture. Of course, where "turn on" violence might foreground stylization and play (as in cartoons, Westerns, thrillers, etc.), "turn off" violence might emphasize graphic realism, giving violent scenes a visually explicit character, showing distress, injury, pain, blood, wounds, etc. The extent to which the enjoyment of such scenes has a pathological basis is a matter of debate (see Conrich). The key issue perhaps is not so much how screen violence measures up to real life but the way in which the viewer is invited to watch the violence and where that violence fits into the dramatic context. The representation of a murder may be far less controversial than that of an assault or a mugging, for example, depending on the extent of the graphic nature of the depiction—how far it exploits images of physical

injury or lacks action values, and thus depends on the violence itself for viewing intensity (see Corner, *Studying Media* 105).

Snuff movies occupy the extreme end of the pornography spectrum, the criminal, illegal, outer limits of screen violence. If they exist, they rely on the promise and lure of direct, unmediated access to the scene of violence and death in order to satisfy the viewer's morbid curiosity. Here, viewing intensity depends on the truth and "reality" of the torture, dismemberment, and gore, on the very "difference" between staged and actual violence (see Corner, *The Art of Record*). As a fiction film, *Tesis* blurs the boundaries between screen and "real" violence (all of its scenes of violence and torture are recreations, not authentic "recorded" footage). Yet, while complicit with the same visual culture that fetishizes violence, *Tesis* also mounts a critique of screen violence and of a visual culture that at some stage may well incorporate snuff into mainstream television output, as has already happened with pornography. As Amenábar points out: "Lo cierto es que cada vez más, hay más violencia en la televisión y *Tesis* lo que hace es plantearle al público: el límite de esa violencia es esto, se llama snuff y ahora es ilegal, del mismo modo que el cine porno . . . ¿El comercio del snuff llegará a ser legal algún día? ¿La television será capaz de emitir este tipo de imágenes?" (Sempere 79). In other words, where do we draw the line? When is screen violence acceptable (comic, playful?), and when is it unacceptably graphic, distressing, or exploitative? *Tesis* suggests that we at least have the ability to reflect critically on the issue.

12

Conceptualizing "the Impact" in *Los amantes del Círculo Polar* (Julio Medem, 1998)

Robert A. Davidson

Introduction

Julio Medem's 1998 film *Los amantes del Círculo Polar* begins and ends with the camera lingering on the aftermath of two impacts. The first is that of the crash of a courier plane that goes down after the pilot, Otto, has bailed out over northern Finland; the second is the apparent death of the female lead and love interest, Otto's stepsister Ana, who is struck by a bus in the film's final moments. While these instances of two very kinetic impacts neatly bookend what is an intricate and at times challenging picture, I believe that the ramifications of these and other collisions (and near-collisions) in the film are much more extensive. I propose that they occupy privileged positions at both the diegetic and visual levels of the film and, additionally, provide an opportunity for further study from a more theoretical perspective.

The nature of Medem's picture stymies the critic who seeks to encapsulate plot lines, episodes, or images; the internal workings and cues of the film are too codependent, too entangled in each other to permit easy access and description. Nevertheless, I would suggest that one way to approach the central issue of cyclical happenstance in *Los amantes* is to consider the notion of the impact as a variable, yet fundamental, unifying

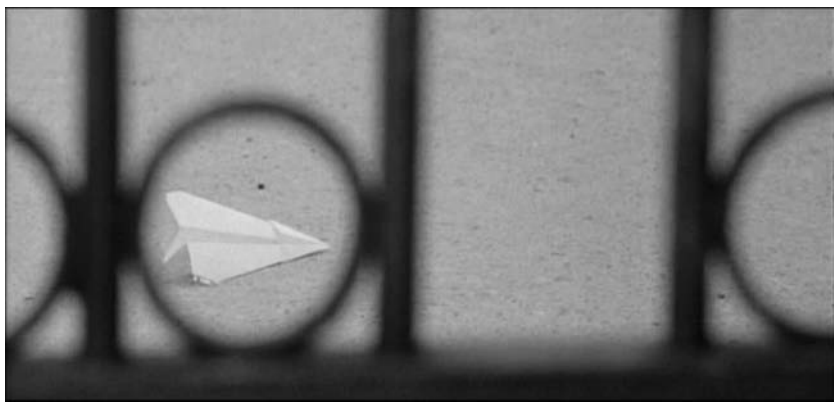

Fig. 12. Paper airplane at rest. Courtesy of Sociedad General de Cine.

aspect of the film.[1] Through an examination of how collisions of different types—kinetic, temporal, and historical—intertwine and consequently inflect both the storytelling and the cinematography, it is possible to better appreciate their pervasiveness in Medem's picture and consider also how this frequency contributes to the director's treatment of coincidence and circularity. My examination of the different registers of the impact and how the director renders them in *Los amantes* leads into the realm of theories of vision and motion where the work of two philosophers of the image, Gilles Deleuze and Paul Virilio, offers important insights. As becomes clear, the impact's ability to serve as a narrative and visual bridge has much in common with these critics' respective approaches to speed and time in the visual fields of film and the virtual. My analysis of the impact thus explores Medem's least-commented-on film in a way that opens the door to consideration of a dimension hitherto unexplored in critical appraisals of the director or his work.

Establishing the Impact: A Close Reading of the Opening Scenes

The inherent instability of an impact, a moment that is most often represented or made accessible through its consequences,[2] underlines the importance of establishing an interrelatedness of things, of broaching a latent appearance of cause and effect or resonance in which memory plays a key role. This is an attraction that exerts itself even if, in the virtual world or one in which telematics rule, instantaneity, stealth technology,

and "smart" bombs often defeat our established notions of causal relationships and challenge our ability to "keep up to speed." In cinema, digital cameras have surpassed the limitations of celluloid squares on reels, but still, the frame remains.[3] I would suggest that the interrelatedness between the different types of impacts and near-impacts in *Los amantes* relies on the primacy of the frame even as it opens the door to consideration of frameless cinema, or cinema of a single, digitally encoded file, perhaps considered as one of Medem's multiple circles of representation, with no fixed beginning or end. In the Basque director's picture, kinetic or physical contacts (either realized or not) are intimately linked to changes in subjectivity as well as to "temporal" collisions (changes in time period, with different actors playing the protagonists), which, in turn, are underpinned by what I see as a single, fundamental historical impact that resonates at the local (familial) and national levels throughout the overriding diegetic frame of the film.[4]

A close reading of the opening scenes of *Los amantes* demonstrates how Medem establishes his different plays of memory and subjectivity, and their connection, with the impact. It points also to the ability of collisions to bridge the gaps between characters, time periods, and different spaces, which in turn underlines the importance of speed and perception in a conceptualization of the impact itself.

Los amantes begins with a shot of a blank screen and the sound of the wind in off. While the title sequence's black credits fade in and out, simulating the effects of blowing snow, a series of pulsating flashes—or, more appropriately given the arctic climate, white-outs—initiates a change in the background, which starts to become more defined. A song replaces the wind and gradually the white-blue screen starts to acquire depth.[5] Little by little, one realizes that this is the wreckage from an airplane crash. First the fuselage appears, then the nose of the craft, and, following another flash, the entire plane fills the screen, its length matched by the title of the film above it. The courier vessel that carries messages within is inscribed from without by the titles, as what had been up until that point largely indeterminate debris juxtaposes with the bright fades. These are the first appearances of the white flashes that will repeat constantly throughout the picture. The title sequence codes them initially with the image of the wreckage amid the stark nothingness of the tundra. They will acquire more meaning as the film progresses, but for now, with an indeterminate time frame, they refer to the tranquil nothingness of the crash site. As far as the titles are concerned, not only do they serve to limit the "reality" of the image by inscribing the fictional perimeter of the work in the momentarily static frame, they also delimit the geography of the plot within the accumulated meaning that will be bestowed on the

plane "posthumously," that is, in the two-hour cinematic aftermath of what the viewer sees as the initial impact. The accumulation of diegetic meaning in reference to the plane will expand the visual importance of the flash such that at a symbolic level, it becomes indicative of impacts of various types.[6]

The differentiation of the flash, initially associated with the image of the airplane crash, begins immediately following the credit sequence. This occurs as the image of the outcome of the plane's impact with the ground is meditated by an ingenious cut—again via the flash—to the exact same long shot of the plane, only this time captured in a black-and-white newspaper photo that bobs violently before being swept away by the wind. The jerking motion of the paper reminds the viewer of the difficulty of apprehending visually all facets of an impact as, seemingly, the wind that catches the thrown newspaper has blown from the past of the title sequence into the next frame, thus blurring time periods and hinting at an instantaneity of imaging between the plane and the newspaper.[7]

Medem's diversification of the impact continues through his use of an extreme close-up of Ana (portrayed by Najwa Nimri) that shows the apparently fatal result of a different physical collision: one between a body and a bus. Later, the viewer will learn that she was struck at the same time as she crossed the street, engrossed by the plane's image in the paper that she had just purchased. Due to the film's out-of-sequence and *in medias res* opening, the viewer perceives a time lag here and throughout the picture as the plot catches up to the beginning. Within the story, another sort of time delay is at work and, partly as a consequence of the mediated impact of the plane, Ana becomes the crash's sole victim. One may plumb even further and observe that, as a result of a chain of events begun three generations earlier, essentially, she turns out to be a long-delayed casualty of the Luftwaffe's actions in Euzkadi. From the beginning of the film, then, the notion of the impact begins to surpass the immediate and stretch across time, thus bringing to the table the question of temporal as well as physical resonance within *Los amantes*. Through the addition of the emotional aspect of the different impacts that occur in the diegesis, an affective resonance will also accrue, expanding its bridge-like quality by further embedding it in both the fictional and cinematic infrastructures of the picture.

I identify the German Condor Legion's activity in Euskadi during the Spanish Civil War as having caused the seminal historical impact that is at the root of all of the film's coincidences. The many circles that Medem's picture presents emanate like ripples from the contact of the bomber's payloads with the Basque village of Gernika. However, apart from the much-removed death of Ana, this earlier event manifests only

obliquely in the opening sequence of *Los amantes*. More precisely, it does so in the figure of the old man, the German bomber pilot for whom Otto was named, framed briefly in the window overlooking the square of the Finnish town of Rovaniemi. The brevity of the moment notwithstanding, it is an important detail. For while it points to the interrelatedness of the different types of coincidences and impacts captured in the film's phantasmagorical and montage-like "prologue," diegetically it also harkens to the fulcrum of a story that doubles back on itself, a narrative axis around which the picture will eventually revolve.

Suspending the Moment

The succession of images and cuts in the film's opening lays the groundwork for its subsequent fragmented exposition as well as for the important role of the visualized and metaphoric impacts that mark the film. The "prologue" sequence ends with the grown Otto's face reflected in Ana's moribund eyes. As if to further reinforce his association with both the plane he piloted and the woman's end—and hence the relation between the two—the white flash returns, this time punctuated by the simple intertitle of his name. The brief intermediary scene that follows this morbid superimposition is significant at many levels. First, Medem cuts to a panoramic shot of a northern lake with the sun visible in the distance through the trees. Then, the orb drifts across the sky in time-lapse as Otto's voice in off speaks of the circularity of his existence. This is prior to an extended flashback during which the viewer learns how he came to meet the woman with whom he will share a lifelong connection. The sequence acts as a narrative anchor by introducing the flashbacks that make up the bulk of the film and merits close attention in that it contributes as well to the increasingly important diversification of the concept of the impact that the picture presents.

Reviewers have cited Medem's first arctic sun shot and its accompanying one, taken from Ana's nearby perspective, as examples of the director's keen cinematic and stylistic eye.[8] At a diegetic and symbolic level, however, the fact that the sun never impacts the ground skews—although certainly does not eradicate—the possibilities of mapping or of a metaphorical taking of bearings.[9] In this manner, Medem reinforces the ironically "programmatic" power of fate or chance that exerts itself on the characters within the diegesis.

More importantly for the present discussion of the impact as a bridging device, the constant suspension of the sun means that the horizon effectively loses its charge as a temporal vanishing point. I read this specific

lack of impact with the ground as representative of a breakdown of the nocturnal-diurnal cycle and also of a possible rupturing of the sequence of the cinematic experience: darkness followed by light followed by darkness. The sun's path signifies a form of stasis which, at the camera's accelerated bidding, makes it describe the largest of the film's many circles. As a result, the shot avoids closure and prolongs indefinitely the visibility of a sun that is akin to Medem's camera in that it delimits the events of the film and, through changes in subjectivity, takes in the action from a variety of perspectives, metaphorically breaking the 180-degree rule. The resulting effect creates a sense of inclusiveness and connectivity between the events that come to pass as part of the flashbacks and afterwards in the conclusion.

From the very onset of *Los amantes*, then, the viewer is confronted with an anomaly—albeit a natural one—that will be but the first of many that push another form of suspension to the limit, that of disbelief at the improbable string of coincidences that the picture offers. And just as Ana's moment of death is delayed so as to present an alternate ending, so the film suspends other moments, replays them, and jumps back and forth between subjects as it plays with the timeline. The impacts that force the progression of the story are resisted yet also given shape by these suspensions and deferrals. This is fortuitous since the near-impacts, suspensions, and views of aftermath all combine to present a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of impact itself by establishing a horizon beyond the singular moments of collision.

What the viewer does not immediately realize about the impressive arctic sun shot at the beginning of *Los amantes* is that its first appearance is from Otto's perspective as he hangs by his parachute in a tree. This most literal form of a suspension of an impact is another indicator of the historical charge at work in the film in that it repeats the same situation of a Condor Legion bomber pilot from the 1930s, whom we see in a flashback. This German's dilemma plays a role in the story that is almost as important as the off-screen bombing that is the film's foundation. When the pilot gets hung up, personal trajectories are altered in more ways than one; his encounter with Otto's grandfather sets off two paths that will run parallel until they eventually converge again years later. Here one finds the first of many instances of doubling that occur in the film related to some sort of impact. While the German's predicament initiates contact and generational echoes that support the infrastructure of *Los amantes*, Otto's suspension both determines the narrative (by providing "time" for the flashback) and delays fatally his reunion with Ana. At this point in the film, the viewer has already seen the postponement's tragic aftermath during the out-of-sequence opening

of the picture. In this sense, the personal, friendly contact of bomber and "victim" (Otto's Basque grandfather) within the context of mass death in Gernika is inverted; Ana and Otto's private tragedy takes place within an increasingly globalized world where distance and time are no longer impediments to interpersonal relations or relationships.[10]

Surpassing the Moment

It is important to consider now not only how the impacts manifest within the diegesis but also what role Medem's camera plays in his treatment of them as they relate to circularity in general. In *Los amantes*, even the impacts that initially appear to be obvious singularities, unrepeatable confluences of events, objects, and subjects, are shown to be connected and are replayed as part of Medem's handling of coincidence. In this sense, rather than exist in isolation within their own particular moments, the impacts resonate; they have echoes that sound out the circular design of the picture both visually and according to the limits established by the diegesis. Once more, these impact-echoes not only appear through different time periods, but their manipulation by Medem intimately connects them to the suspense inherent to the plot (will the two get together? Followed by: will the lovers be reunited?), thus imbuing the impacts with an affective element. The repetition or reverberation of circumstances and specific types of collisions links the emotional charge of the love story that is played up in the couple's near-misses—they cross paths unknowingly in midair and also in Madrid's Plaza Mayor—to the underlying historical material and the physics of movement (both diegetic and cinematographic).

The paper airplane sequence at the beginning of the series of flashbacks is a good example of how Medem plants visual cues while manipulating the camera and his subjects so that all contribute to the repetitive aspects of the film at work at different diegetic levels. In the instance of the single paper airplane among many that is successful in bridging the gap between the boy's and girl's schools, the director privileges it with a close-up tracking shot, cutting to a tilt that emphasizes its height and trajectory before switching to a pan down that reestablishes the perspective of the young Otto, who has thrown it in an attempt to contact Ana. The plane, which bears a message of love that, conveniently, will bring the parents of Otto and Ana together, impacts the ground and Medem shoots it at rest, framed entirely within a decorative iron circle from the fence. This mise-en-scène is reminiscent of the lens's attention to the messenger plane at the beginning—itself symbolic of contact gone

awry—and reinforces visually the close relationship between circularity and impacts in the picture while making reference to future events within the diegesis.

Likewise, three memorable scenes involving vehicles show how Medem's repetition of one specific type of impact creates a visual resonance that both reflects the circularity of life's circumstances in *Los amantes* and shows how the flash/impact surpasses singularity in different ways at different epochs. In the first instance, Otto's father, Alvaro, who is driving the family car, brakes suddenly to avoid an accident. Inadvertently, this action sends the young boy flying into the dash. Rather surprisingly, Otto (here played by the director's son, Peru Medem) is instantly angered and slaps his father. It seems drastic until the older man abruptly converts the relatively mild kinetic impact into an emotional one by breaking the news of his impending separation from Otto's mother. Otto's lashing out then makes sense, but only as an anticipated reaction to this much more powerful and disturbing impact. It is as if the scene were being played out backward, an effect that reminds the viewer of the subjective nature of the play of memory that is occurring and that serves as a reminder that the circular movements in the film are liable to be reversed.

The second instance, Otto and Ana's transition from childhood to adolescence, is one of Medem's most inspired scenes. It too plays with the stream of time, but rather than turning it back on itself, the scene demonstrates an acceleration of time. Again, the space in question is the family car, now being driven by Ana's mother, Olga. When her sudden braking propels the two children off-screen momentarily, they are jolted back again, instantly transformed into teenagers portrayed by Kristel Díaz and Víctor Hugo Oliveira, respectively. Visual trickery notwithstanding, the jarring impact of the collision writes itself as a repeated event in their personal narratives; it resonates and ties the impact directly to their growth and development. This is particularly true in Otto's case as the viewer is witness to how the car becomes a site of his nascent sexual desires when he tries to feel Ana's thigh in the aftermath of the vehicle's collision with the bus.

The last example of braking occurs near the end of the picture and brings the film full circle. Adult Otto (Fele Martínez), who has been rescued from his parachute predicament, is being driven into Rovaniemi. The scene parallels the previous two involving sudden stops, even down to the red bus that enters from off-screen. Otto is thrown once more into the dash while the inevitable trajectory of the bus continues unabated. It collides with Ana, who is distracted by the photo of Otto's plane. The viewer realizes that he or she has already seen this event; the initially encrypted montage from the film's beginning can now be decoded and,

rather than take in only the aftermath, the impact itself is shown in long shot. One of the more striking images from the picture, it serves as a macabre release of the kinetic and dramatic energies that have been building throughout the second half of the film. At last, the viewer is able to assemble and fully visualize the impact: from the flashback build-up, through the various suspensions, to the grim aftermath and then, in the last instance, the moment of contact itself.

Speed and Perception

The many examples of collisions in *Los amantes* and their importance to both the diegesis and the visual experience of the film open the door to consideration of two other notions that are intrinsic, if not crucial, to reflection on the cinematic expression of the impact in the film: speed and perception. These elements are, of course, intrinsic to the very workings of cinema in that until the advent of digital cameras, cinema had always relied on the rapid projection of single frames so as to emulate movement. French critic Gilles Deleuze understands this dynamic as the movement-image, in which each celluloid frame represents an "immobile cut." In the resultant acceleration or deceleration of the projection, cinema relies on the viewer's perception of the frames at speed to simulate movement, hence the moving picture. Time cannot be left out of the mix either and, as McQuire astutely observes, in film's reorientation of the mimetic project, "[t]he reproduction of spatial relations (perspective, form, composition) was henceforth indissolubly meshed with the reproduction of temporal relations (duration, rhythm, sequence)" (66).

Paul Virilio's conception of the perception of speed is relevant to the cinematic effect and also to the present discussion of the impact. In *The Vision Machine*, he observes that: "[. . .] speed is not a phenomenon but, indeed, *the relationship between phenomena* (relativity itself), [thus] the question raised of the observation distance of phenomena comes down to the question of the power of perception (mental or instrumental)" (74). Virilio's observations bring us back to Medem's *materia prima*, the question of circularity, which comes into play through the connection of the role of memory to the type of immediate perception of moving light that cinema entails (61).[11] In the case of *Los amantes*'s impact flash, it would not be excessive to identify it as a form of retinal retention or visual persistence of the first and last image: the desolate snowscape, the empty screen or Ur-Impact that, by means of the same visual effect, simultaneously wipes the slate clean and accrues differentiation and qualitative meaning throughout the film. Virilio draws alongside Deleuze when he broaches the subject of

afterimage with a cinematic metaphor: "the discovery of retinal retention is much more than insight into a *time-lag* (the imprinting of the image on the retina). It is the discovery of a *freeze-frame effect* which speaks to us of some kind of unscrolling, of Rodin's time that 'does not stand still'; in other words of the intensive time of human perceptiveness" (75). As the viewer sees in the "unscrolling" of the story and visuals of *Los amantes*, even frozen or suspended within the static boundary of a circle or of a sun that never sets, there is movement. As a result of the film's impacts, which demand consideration of circumstance and aftermath (a form of persistence), there exists a relentless push or continuation of a past into a present and toward a future. This is true even if that future is circular and damned to repeat itself until, ultimately, death on an individual scale halts the progression of seventy years of reverberation and distillation from a moment of mass terror. As we shall see, this inherent movement is part and parcel of Deleuze's conception of the cinematic image as well as an integral part of the function and effect of the impact the flash represents in *Los amantes*.

At the visual level, I have mentioned already that the impact of the plane imprints itself metaphorically on the film by coding the white light that constantly breaks the narrative. That it also initiates at the same time plays of memory that affect the circular and coincidental nature of the film demonstrates the overlap between the plot of *Los amantes* and Medem's cinematographic vision. It bears pointing out the obvious fact that the division of the film into very delineated narrative segments corresponding to the differing perspectives of the two protagonists makes the treatment of memory dependent on their subjective viewpoints.[12] The camera follows and adapts to these swings, which are announced by the intertitles. The oscillation is fluid and not overly disruptive, even if many times the viewer is returned to certain scenes where his or her initial take is readjusted. From Otto to Ana and back again, diegetic time and plot movement become as flexible as the protagonists' palindromic names. In this sense, it is certainly true that one can read the film back to front.

In terms of camerawork and Medem's treatment of speed, the winter scene in which Otto slides off a cliff is a good example of how the director brings together physics, plot, and cinematography under the bridge of the impact. The scene comes on the heels of Otto's mother's funeral and is introduced by yet another of the white flashes. At this moment in the film, Ana and Otto are sledding in a forest. Ana's bail-out prior to the sled reaching an ominous cliff is a symbolic act that speaks to the impossibility of their union, something that Otto's own escape from the airplane and their subsequent failed meeting prefigure in the film's first few scenes. Otto's grief and mourning for his mother, who was a suicide,

has trumped the affection he holds for Ana. The possibility of death is not portrayed as a force that will bring the two lovers together but rather as a means of rejoining mother and son. Accordingly, the final few meters of the sled's trajectory are rendered in a point-of-view shot from Otto's solitary perspective. Although the director again equates the white flash with an impact (Otto hitting the ground), this sequence stands out for the way it visually manipulates the perception of speed and then literally turns back the clock at the behest of a character's emotional desire.

Otto's fall off the cliff is captured in a medium shot as the camera tracks alongside him. Medem does not shoot the descent in slow motion; it occurs at a normal pace, but rather than plummeting through the trees, Otto drops leisurely. He is suspended above the ground, slowed down in what seems to be a state of grace. The viewer's expectation that he will achieve a terminal velocity is denied, a point to which the character himself alludes when he wonders aloud why he has not perished. At this moment, death is displaced. The demise that becomes the referent of the episode is solely that of his mother, whom he cites during what the viewer assumes to be a hallucinated rescue at the hands of the Man of the Woods. The enormous fur-clad Laplander who carries Otto on his back glides improbably uphill on skis, an action that reverses the trajectory of the young man's fall and, again, denotes the fluidity of the circular nature of time that the film portrays.

In the scene just described, Medem approaches speed in two ways: first, through the odd, suspended fall that displays a fantastical negation of gravity, then, in a temporal sense in the forest cabin, where Otto has been taken to warm up. There, the replacement of the mature Otto by Peru Medem's younger version concretizes the time shift that the physical "rewinding" of the skiing scene initiated. Otto's adulterated fall and lessened impact combined with his desire to die and be reunited with his mother gives the scene a strong emotional element that contributes to the further diversification of the meaning of the white flash.

Immanence

If impacts, near-impacts, and suspensions occur frequently within *Los amantes*, then what are the bright flashes exactly, and how do they acquire meaning during the film? First, I suggest that at a purely visual level, they symbolize the exact moments of impact that the suspensions and near-misses allude to; they are the ultimate point-of-view shots of objects and/or people as they collide physically and metaphorically within the film. Literally, they are the bridges that connect Medem's narrative

montage. Second, I maintain that the flashes point to nothing less than the immanence of the impact as a device in *Los amantes*. In this, they denote aspects of Gilles Deleuze's take on Henri Bergson's notion of *durée*: that the experience of time as a "dynamic continuation of a past into a present and towards a future" is also representative of a whole of relations and likewise is expressed by movement (Bogue 13, 26). Medem's use of the flashes breaks the diegesis visually (often in conjunction with the increasingly complex intertitles) and as a result effectuates a differentiation that contributes to an immanent function of the impact. In other words, by employing them in a manner that prompts changes in perceptual subjectivity and temporality, the director contributes to the overall differentiation of the whole of his film in spite of its repetitive nature.

This immanence of the impact is closely related to the various forms of movement at work in the picture. Like *durée*, the impact permanently pervades the cinematic universe of *Los amantes* and carries with it both diegetic and extradiegetic relevance. Here, a review of Deleuze's understanding of cinematic movement is in order: according to Ronald Bogue, for the French philosopher, movement is the intermediary between closed sets and the open whole (41). He identifies two forms: first, a change of position of objects in a contained space (immobile cuts) and second, the qualitative transformation of an open totality of relations (mobile cuts) (41). Thus, Deleuze considers movement as having two inseparable facets, like the way a coin has two faces. According to him, movement "is the relationship between parts and it is the state of the whole" (19). In the case of *Los amantes*, rather than a series of singularities, that is, of closed-set occurrences, the flashes are a linking system that "reminds" us of the penetrating *durée* of the impact as we are likewise reminded constantly—through flashbacks, photographs, and voice-overs—of the incredible series of coincidences that make up the whole of the movie as a result of the figurative and literal collisions.

So now the question is: how does the flash/impact attain its immanent function? In response to this query I read the white-out also as a modified version of Deleuze's "rarefied" image within the closed set of the frame, that is, as one end of the empty limits of the white or black screen.[13] In this case, the bright white flash may be read as the totalized visual impression of the impact, as overexposure, an extension and remnant of its status as an ultimate point-of-view shot that drives, as I have suggested, the physical and diegetic motion of the film, yet, at the same time, denotes movement beyond the ground-zero point, thus establishing a horizon that includes its aftermath and possible deferral. In contrast to the pervasive white flashes, the few instances of their opposite number, the fade-to-black, occur within the closed set of an individual

character's subjectivity: young Otto's effort to make Ana appear in the rain, for instance, or his later attempt to revive her when she has been hit. In both cases, despite the fact that the camera acts in tandem with the protagonist's eyes by means of a shutter effect, the shot remains disembodied, a hybrid, objective point of view that keeps the character in either long or medium shot, and thus clearly displays the limits of the immobile cut. On the other hand, the pervasive and "dynamic" bright flashes break the surface tension of the frames, thus establishing a link between subjectivities, images, and movements.

Conclusion

Los amantes del Círculo Polar is a film that revolves around collisions: those of unseen bombs with a town, planes with the ground, cars with buses, and of people with each other and themselves. Medem's encoding of the impact as a symbolic recurring white flash manages to both capture and rupture moments of contact. In so doing, he also seizes the essence of *durée* and ensures that the impact's immanence of movement through space and time is not contained by the singularity of the instant. Through the combination of suspended collisions and considerations of their aftermath, the impact assumes a privileged position in the film, a fact that Medem exploits in its circular diegesis. Within the subjective limits that the narrative establishes, the impact/flash acts as a bridge; it extends the horizon of the moment by harnessing the speed of unfolding events and by permitting the manipulation of time itself. Medem's treatment of coincidence in *Los amantes* relies on his own particular form of cinematic impact-echoing; by sounding out the fault lines in the lives of his protagonists, he revisits key points in their lives, following the characters through time and deftly retouching the viewer's perspective again and again and again.

Notes

1. In one of the few treatments of the concept of "the impact" that I have found, Jeffrey T. Schnapp sees it as part of the modern subject's experience of a stimulating, velocity-induced addiction loop. According to Schnapp, "the crash becomes a necessary feature of this loop structure, at once vouching for its legitimacy (by crystallizing the very intensity for which it stands), serving as a regenerative device (by initiating a new cycle of hyperstimulation), and marking an absolute limit (death)" (4). Schnapp does enter into the visual aspects of the impact, but he qualifies them in that "every accident requires a viewer, or better, a *voyeur* to relay

its stimulus out into the world. The accident, in short, will emerge as the locus of a form of trauma that, contrary to prevailing traumatocentric accounts of modernity, engenders neither psychic blockage nor new surefire forms of regimentation or alienation" (4). Another work that deals directly with the (fictional) aesthetics of the collision is J. G. Ballard's 1973 cult novel, *Crash*, which was brought to the screen by David Cronenberg in 1996.

2. This is changing. With advances in photographic and video technology, our ability to perceive the exact moment during which an innocuous site becomes one of an impact has expanded accordingly. From cameras attached to the fronts of cars that run into walls, other cars, and people, to the infamous "bomb's eye-view" shots during the Gulf War, the visual apprehension of the impact has become a corollary aspect of the West's culture of speed and mitigated distances.

3. For a provocative study of the so-called death of cinema that considers the physical decay of celluloid alongside issues of cultural memory and spectatorship, see Cherchi Usai.

4. For a reading of *Los amantes* according to a specifically genealogical focus, see D'Lugo ("The Geopolitical Aesthetic").

5. According to Ulrich Beck, the song, a Finnish tango named "Sinitaivas" by Olavi Virta and Harmony Sisters, casts the film's narrative arc to Finland (161). Until the next scene, however, there is no visual confirmation of the setting.

6. The airplane is a leitmotif within the diegesis. That the first recognizable image in the picture is a plane that has been destroyed sets the table for the affective charge that will be associated with the impact throughout *Los amantes*.

7. The contrasting black titles on the white Arctic background in the opening seconds prefigure the newspaper's ink on the page. The subsequent "instant" appearance and exact reproduction of the image of the plane in the press suggests both the notion of speed in information transfer in modern media and the sensationalistic attraction of disaster.

8. See Schwartz and Plate, among others.

9. Otto, who had inscribed Ana's name on a map of the Arctic, has landed in the general vicinity of her cabin but is nevertheless off target. In addition, his ruminations on the past that the viewer sees via flashback run in a circle, much like the sun that he is observing.

10. For more on globalization, Medem, and contemporary Spanish cinema, see D'Lugo ("The Geopolitical Aesthetic"). For a study of how "questions of identity are constructed and articulated in Spanish cinema during an era of transnational cinema distribution and consumption," see Ulrich Beck (135).

11. In this sense, I link the spectator's cinematic recall of diegetic events and specific images to the physical phenomenon of persistence of vision, which, as Doane points out, involves a potentially imperfect afterimage that "carries in its wake the connotations of flaw, deficiency, failure, and fatigue" through its wedding of "human finitude to the machine" (78). It should be noted that the persistence of vision phenomenon is not universally accepted as an explanation for motion perception in film. See, especially, Joseph and Barbara Anderson, who dispute it based on physiological grounds.

12. Within the mise-en-scène, only the newspaper and the brief clips of a television documentary stand out as exceptions of an external voice encroaching on these subjective takes on events.

13. "Saturated," for Deleuze, refers to a framed image full of information, while "rarefied" denotes one in which the information content has been reduced to the near-nothingness state of the blank screen onto which it is projected (Bogue 42).

13

Immortal/Undead

The Body and the Transmission of Tradition in *Amic/Amat* (Ventura Pons, 1998)

Josep-Anton Fernàndez

"Nothing is for sure. Maybe, someday, some heir will save us from pain. An heir who will come from us, but won't be like us"[1]: a terminally ill professor speaks about salvation. His determination to leave a legacy entails a commitment to the futurity of a lasting world, but also a promise of salvation toward the past, as the heir will be a new beginning that would redeem the ancestors. The heir is to accept a legacy as heavy as the world, and so he becomes connected to the past and fulfills the ancestor's desire for immortality. But what if he refuses to accept the legacy?

The words above are spoken by Jaume Clarà, the protagonist of Ventura Pons's film *Amic/Amat* (*Beloved/Friend*, 1998). Jaume (Josep Maria Pou) is a professor of medieval Catalan literature who returns home after many years abroad. As death approaches, he wishes to leave an intellectual legacy—an essay about Ramon Llull, the founder of Catalan literature. Jaume is gay and has no children; he wants his best student, David Vila (David Selvas), to be his heir, but the nihilistic David will reject the legacy. David has impregnated Alba (Irene Montalà), the daughter of Fanny and Pere Roure. Pere (Mario Gas) is Jaume's best friend, a fellow university professor, and the love of his life. When Jaume finds out about

Fig. 13. Rosa Maria Sardà and Irene Montalà as Fanny and Alba in *Amic/Amat*. Courtesy of Els Films de la Rambla.

the pregnancy, he begs Pere to convince Alba not to have an abortion, and tries to persuade David to raise the child. Meanwhile, Fanny (Rosa Maria Sardà) confronts her own frustrations: a former 1960s revolutionary, she is now a bourgeois housewife who tries to complete herself vicariously through Alba.

Amic/Amat raises a crucial problem in postmodern times: the possibility of transmitting a cultural tradition. This is not a new theme in Pons's filmography: his 1996 film, *Actrius* (*Actresses*), focuses on the competition among three prominent actresses for the symbolic legacy of a grande dame of Catalan theatre. But here the problem of tradition—of connecting the future with the past—is dealt with more explicitly, juxtaposing salvation and redemption on the one hand and homosexuality and reproduction on the other. Moreover, the film presents several private dilemmas while invoking, through reference to the literary and cultural tradition, a collective voice (the "we" in Jaume's words) that reveals an underlying political dimension.

It is precisely this collective dimension that will allow us to make sense, in all its complexity, of a plot that would otherwise be simply melodramatic. Understanding this aspect of the film requires a suitable theoretical framework, which may be provided by Hannah Arendt's analysis of the political consequences of the cultural changes derived from secularization and the emergence of capitalism. In *Between Past and Future*,

Arendt claims that modernity is characterized by the loss of the trinity of tradition, authority, and religion, which had given humans a sense of permanence and continuity in the face of mortality. The loss of tradition involved a radical change in our relationship with time: "Without tradition [. . .] there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle" (Arendt, *Between Past* 5).

The experience of modernity is thus one of alienation. The modern world lost "the structure of the political realm and the experience of plurality and freedom which constitute its essential reality" (Bowen-Moore 105). But analyzing modernity in terms of this loss "presupposes an understanding of antecedent experiences which identified a worldly context within which political life was most manifest" (Bowen-Moore 105). Arendt finds this context in the Roman concept of authority. Roman institutions were legitimated by their constant appeal to the foundation of the city; they derived their authority from that of the ancestors, the founding fathers. To have authority was to be able to *augment* the founders' legacy, thus adding to the tradition that provided a link with the living past and giving the body politic a sense of stability (Arendt 124).

It is thus clear that the loss of tradition should become "a fact of political relevance" (Arendt 14). Without tradition, establishing a connection with the past that ensures the future and plurality of the world becomes a problem of enormous magnitude that accentuates the modern experience of alienation. If this experience is a consequence of "the decline of the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority, with the concomitant undermining of the specifically Roman foundations of the political realm," claims Arendt, then the defining political events of the modern age, the revolutions, do not appear as radical breaks but as "gigantic attempts to repair these foundations, to renew the broken thread of tradition, and to restore, through founding new political bodies" (140), the public thing, in order to reclaim freedom.

What interests me here is that Arendt's view of revolution as a return to the foundation, as "the only salvation which [the] Roman-Western tradition has provided for emergencies" (141), resonates with Walter Benjamin's description of revolution as "a tiger's leap into the past" that blasts open "the continuum of history" (253). For Benjamin the working class is not the agent of progress, but "the last enslaved class," "the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden" (251). He attacks the German Social Democracy for giving the working class "the role of redeemer of future generations," thereby "cutting the sinews of its greatest strength" and making it forget "both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are

nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren" (252).

Invoking the foundation must therefore be a radical political gesture that exceeds its institutional and aesthetic parameters. But the political dimension of the appeal to the founding father of Catalan literature, Ramon Llull, is not made explicit in Pons's film. The continuity of Catalan culture is nevertheless a topical issue, often discussed in inadequate terms. Different and contradictory forms of essentialism are invoked, be it a market fundamentalism that denies any possibility for small- and medium-sized cultures to compete, or a cultural essentialism that takes for granted a future existence without considering geopolitical and economic realities. But essentialism cannot explain the material and institutional dimensions of the struggles (symbolic or otherwise) that aim at preserving the Spanish status quo or at securing a future for Catalan culture.

A more productive perspective would consider the institutional, political, and economic evolution of Catalan culture. The period between 1980 and 1999—which saw the consolidation of the monarchic Restoration and the regionalist government of Jordi Pujol—was an attempt at "national reconstruction" after the ravages of Francoism. The effort to reestablish Catalan culture is also termed "cultural normalization"; its aim was creating a cultural industry in Catalan while retaining a balance between mass and high culture. However, "normalization" has coexisted with a widespread feeling of crisis and dissatisfaction, and has failed in some crucial areas of cultural production. Cinema is a case in point. While television and theatre have thrived, the project of a Catalan film industry has failed. As Paul Julian Smith states, "[t]he current state of Catalan cinema [. . .] is not a happy one," and "[the] Catalan audiovisual sector [. . .] is in permanent crisis" (*Contemporary Spanish Culture* 118, 124). Film is a prime example of the arena of normalization, defined by unresolved tensions such as popularity vs. prestige, business vs. art, visibility vs. invisibility.

Amic/Amat is placed at the heart of this field of tensions. Its director, Ventura Pons, is the most prominent Catalan filmmaker, with fifteen films to his credit; his success as an independent filmmaker could well be a model for the future of Catalan cinema (Smith, *Contemporary Spanish Culture* 139). The film's cast includes some of Catalonia's best-known actors, many of whom have become famous thanks to their work for both the theatre and television. The screenplay was written by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet—the most senior Catalan playwright and author of extremely popular *telenovel·les* (soap operas)—based on his play *Testament* (1996).

The fact that this is a cinematic adaptation of a stage play is relevant in terms of the tensions I mentioned above. Phyllis Zatlin has argued that the differences between *Testament* and *Amic/Amat* (the setting in a realistic space; an expanded cast with the introduction of female characters; the disappearance of the off-stage, anonymous voices) provoke a "shift in tone, from the metaphorical to the personal plane" and give the film "the intimate quality of a television drama" (241).

Contemporary reviewers take *Amic/Amat* as an excuse to make a balance of Pons's career, perhaps prompted by his emphasis on the theme of the legacy (Torreiro, "Ventura Pons, cineasta"; Castillejo; Castells). But Pons's concern with "whether we, as a generation, will be able to have an influence on those coming after us so that the world becomes a better place" (Riambau, "Ventura Pons") is generally seen by critics outside its cultural context centered on Ventura Pons's career and as a sign of his evolution into an *auteur*. Thus *Amic/Amat* confirms that Pons is in "a productive creative period" that has won him more recognition in Catalonia and abroad "than in the rest of Spain" (Torreiro, "Ventura Pons, cineasta"; also De Lucas). An overview of Pons's filmography is often offered (Batlle Caminal; Bonet Mojica): *Amic/Amat* stresses his earlier "vigorous turn" in his oeuvre, abandoning "the facile comedy that he used to produce," and concentrating on "adapting existing texts," mostly dramatic (Torreiro "El oficio de vivir"). Such a shift from "superficial" comedy to serious dramas set in Barcelona prompts some critics to compare Pons to Woody Allen (Batlle Caminal; Mas de Xaxàs). This comparison is certainly not irrelevant, because Catalan cinema, it is often said (Smith, *Contemporary Spanish Culture* 119, 124–25), lacks the credibility of figures like Pedro Almodóvar, who might help its international standing.

Amic/Amat's themes thus correspond with the critics' revisionist and canonizing gestures: Ventura Pons emerges as the most prominent Catalan filmmaker, having made a valuable contribution to Catalan culture. But the critics ignore the main problem posed by the film: the paradoxical juxtaposition of the body and the legacy and its location within the wider context of Catalan culture. This will be precisely my focus here. Thus I intend to offer a reading of *Amic/Amat* by considering several questions. What sense can we make of the problematic relationship between cultural legacy and the body in this film? How is the question of reproduction (electronic and biological) articulated with the transmission of tradition and the concern with immortality? What is to be done with a legacy of invisibility and pain inherited by those who are in a subordinated position? How can we read politically a film in which conflicts seem to be entirely personal?

Body/Legacy: Gender, Pederasty, Prostitution

Despite appearances, the existential dilemmas of *Amic/Amat* have a political dimension, brought about by the film's title. As Patricia Bowen-Moore states in her study of Arendt's concept of natality, "[l]ove is apolitical and antipolitical because its interests lie elsewhere than in an active concern for the world"; it plunges the lovers into an intense preoccupation with each other that separates them from "the publicity of the world" (17). Friendship, by contrast, is the stuff of politics. For Arendt, politics "requires that citizens understand their commitment to the world of human affairs"; this commitment takes the form of political friendship, which is "common regard for the in-between, the world, which citizens share" (145).

The film's title expresses a certain ambivalence regarding the binary opposition between love and friendship, indicated by the prominence of homosexual desire, homosociality, and reproduction. From an Arendtian perspective, the effects of such ambivalence are paradoxical on two counts. The first stems from a general point: if politics deals with the government of the public space, the emphasis on the body involved in desire and reproduction is dangerous, because for Arendt "[n]othing is less common, less communicable, less public than the body" (Zerilli 189n); the body entails a threat of indifferentiation because it "ruptures the very boundaries (private/public) and identities (woman/man)" (Zerilli 175) that vouchsafe the plurality of the world. The second is related to the film's main theme: if *Amic/Amat* is a reflection on the possibility of leaving a legacy to future generations, how are we to understand the prominent role of a body that is by definition transient, the exact opposite of a lasting inheritance?

The credits sequence focuses on these contradictions by presenting an eroticized male body. We are shown a dimly lit boudoir in which a young man is preparing for sex. His face never appears on the frame: we only see red-tinted extreme close-ups of different body parts as he undresses. The camera is definitely voyeuristic: it pays great attention to detail as he spreads oil on his skin, then dons a variety of leather S&M props, such as a harness, a jockstrap, and a mask that covers his entire head. The vulgarity suggested by the red light and the extreme sexual load of the S&M paraphernalia vividly contrast with the soundtrack, Carles Cases's grand-sounding, Baroque-style music.

This is, strictly speaking, a perverse body that engages in sex for its own sake, within a fetishistic context that excludes any reproductive aim, thus fitting snugly Freud's definition of perversion (in the first of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) as a deviation from procreation,

the "normal" sexual aim. Yet the first few sequences of the film introduce us to totally opposed issues that have to do with biological reproduction and survival. In a succession of cross-cut dialogues, Pons presents the main characters and their dilemmas. Jaume Clarà is in a classroom at the university, talking with his doctor, who has given him the results of his analyses: Jaume is gravely ill, and despite reassurances as to the new treatments available, he wants to know if the doctor would eventually help him die. Meanwhile, Alba meets David in the corridors of the same building, and tells him that the results of her tests are positive: only later, when she calls her parents Fanny and Pere Roure, will we know that she is pregnant, and that she doesn't know whether to have an abortion. Fanny and Pere are at home: Pere has decided to stay and seduce his wife to prove to himself that he is still "an acceptable lover." Fanny is beginning to question her comfortable bourgeois existence; she has not forgotten "that when I was younger I was a left winger," but her husband does not seem particularly sensitive to her dissatisfaction.

The rapid succession of these dialogues not only serves to present the main characters and create an effect of simultaneity that anticipates the way in which their destinies will be interwoven. It also introduces some of the existential themes of *Amic/Amat*: birth, death, illness; the possibility of terminating both life and pregnancy; parenthood and its responsibilities; old age and bodily decadence. But if we are to make sense of the juxtaposition of these themes with the question of the legacy, we need to read them from two different standpoints: the role of reproduction, examined in the next section, and the sexual politics that emerges as the conflicts we have seen above unfold.

The most salient characteristic of this sexual politics is its deceptive nature. It is true that the characters exist in a very postmodern environment of tolerance: Jaume talks openly about his homosexuality, Pere and Fanny discuss contraception and abortion with Alba very casually, while for David and Alba sexual desire is not fatally constrained by categories and labels. The characters' outlook on sexual morality seems as "modern" as some of the settings Pons has chosen for his film: the light-filled concrete and glass structures of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (not the ivy-covered halls typical of campus films); Pere's split-level apartment, stylishly designed and decorated with contemporary art; and the urban landscape of 1980s and 1990s Barcelona, with its clean lines, hard surfaces, and abstract public art. But closer examination reveals that the sexual politics of *Amic/Amat* is, in fact, the legacy of a distant past, even older than the glorious periods of *Modernisme* and the Middle Ages, whose architectural traces are carefully selected by Pons to appear as the

background of some scenes. The film's sexual politics is dependent on, and reveals the effects of, an ancient patriarchal legacy based on male domination, and expresses a crisis in its transmission.

The process of adaptation from the stage to the screen has stressed this point. While in Benet i Jornet's *Testament* women never appear on stage (although some of the unidentified off-stage voices are female), in Pons's film the characters of Fanny and Alba are introduced and given great prominence. I would claim that the main effect of this change is not, as Zatlin claims, to transport the metaphysical themes of the play into a domestic setting that gives the film "the intimacy of a *telenovela*" (249). Rather, the introduction of female characters points to a tension between permanence and change in gender matters: between the resilience of certain dispositions and schemes of perception and classification that underpin the deep structures of male domination, inscribed in bodies and institutions, and the factors of change that are slowly transforming them.

As Pierre Bourdieu claims in *La domination masculine*, the structures of male domination are rooted in a socio-sexual unconscious "which, having been originally constructed during a very ancient and archaic stage of our societies, lives in each of us, men and women" (61; my translation). This unconscious is historical: it is not bound to a biological or psychological nature (as psychoanalysis would have it), but to a process of social construction that includes the possibility of modification of this unconscious through a change in its historical conditions of production (*Domination* 61). Yet it supports sexual structures and modes of reproduction that are extraordinarily resilient and autonomous with regard to economic structures and modes of production (*Domination* 89); they are the legacy of a traditional culture still present in our times. In order to understand how these sexual structures at the basis of male domination work, we must take "a detour through an exotic tradition" in order to "destroy the relationship of deceptive familiarity that links us to our own tradition" (*Domination* 9).

In the case of *Amic/Amat*, this detour is possible through reference to the sexual politics of ancient Greece, especially with regards to the links between pedagogy and pederasty and the role of male prostitution in the film. Of course, this claim is problematic. Bourdieu warns us that the analysis of the sexual politics of ancient Greece runs the risk of approaching synchronically an object that evolved over centuries and has the epistemological problem of basing an anthropological analysis on texts that may be elaborations of the cultural substratum (*Domination* 12), thus making extrapolations extremely dubious. Yet I am not suggesting that the Greek example is identical to, or representative of, later Mediterranean cultures, or that the sexual order of things in classical

Athens somehow persists or ever existed in Catalonia. Rather, my point is that this reference is justified because of the emphasis in *Amic/Amat* on pedagogy and pederasty (especially considering the prestige attached to classical Greek culture and the fact that in this film the concerns for the body and for the continuity of the intellectual and cultural tradition go hand in hand). Further, the problematic status of pederasty in Greece (discussed later) resonates with the film's questioning of masculinity and male domination.

The film's sexual politics also includes crucial aspects such as the relegation of women to the domestic space and the concept of honor, which are paradigmatic, albeit not exclusive, of all Mediterranean cultures. These aspects can be seen, first and foremost, in the figure of Pere Roure, who, despite his progressive aura, behaves like the patriarch of his household. When Fanny, who has led for years the life of a housewife, tells her husband that she has been offered an international development position in Africa, he laughs and (correctly) assumes that she has refused. Fanny's flexibility is the precondition for the "monotonous and boring life" that he enjoys, the stability that allows Pere to participate in public life as a university professor. Equally revealing is Pere's reaction when he learns that the man who has impregnated his nineteen-year-old daughter is his student David Vila. Suddenly enraged, he exclaims: "How could he? How did he manage to seduce my daughter and knock her up? I'll beat him to death!" Surely, the problem is not that Alba is pregnant, but that David has dishonored *him*. However, Alba and Fanny's reaction of leaving the house denotes a crisis in the transmission of this patriarchal legacy that turns male domination into "something that must be defended or justified" (*Domination* 96), a change that seems to threaten the existence of an entire world and its way of life.

Yet the presence of female characters in *Amic/Amat* and their challenge of the self-evidence of male domination enhance the problematization of masculinity. Not by chance, Pons makes a point of showing us, at different moments, the naked bodies of the three male characters—*from behind*. If the front of the body is the place of sexual difference, its behind is "sexually undifferentiated, and potentially feminine, that is, passive, submissive" (*Domination* 23). This also suggests that the legacy of ancient Greek sexual politics is directly relevant here, through the tradition of pederasty evoked by the film's title. Indeed, *amic* and *amat* can be translated as lover and beloved, terms that correspond to *erastes* and *eromenos*, the participants in the pederastic relationship.

The focus on homosexuality in a film by Pons is not new: as he claims, it is "the trademark of the house" (Campo Vidal 27). *Amic/Amat* is no exception. Even before the disclosure of the protagonists' sexual

tastes, we get visual hints of homoeroticism, such as the posters in David's apartment featuring the spectacular male nudes of gay photographer Tom Bianchi. Nevertheless, despite this and Jaume's confession of his love for Pere and David, there is little evidence of a modern gay identity. No character fits the cinematic stereotypes of gay men, and the film's sexual discourse does not grant much psychic depth to sexual choice. In fact, all Jaume says about his gay identity is, "I've gone to bed with a considerable amount of men," whereas for David sex with men is just something he does. This seems close to a premodern perspective on sexuality, one not based on identities and sexual orientation, but on a discourse of *acts*.[2]

The neutralization of modern discourses of homosexuality displaces the emphasis from identity to the institutional setting of the relationships between the male characters. They all belong to the university, either as teachers or as students; the private exchanges of confidences between them rely on the public dimension of this institutional framework. This fact, together with age differences, suggests that Jaume and David's relationship is modeled, to a large degree, on the Greek institution of pederasty. According to Bruce S. Thornton, pederasty "was not a private pleasure or relationship but a part of the social structure of the polis, one of its 'technologies' for controlling the powerful force of eros" (195). In male homosexual desire, "the dangers of eros [were] magnified, for [. . .] the citizen who submits to anal penetration opens his soul up to a compulsive appetite destructive of the social and political order embodied in and upheld by male citizens" (195–96). The acknowledgment of the homosexual eros thus demanded protecting the honor of future citizens: "Pederasty is to sodomy as marriage is to adultery" (204). Sexual intercourse between an adult male and a boy had an educational purpose: "The boy and his sexual power were channelled into teaching him his proper role as 'good and beautiful/noble citizen' " (197).

A noble citizen—or a promising academic. The pederastic model of Jaume and David's relationship becomes apparent in a sequence in which the professor gives David a lift home so as to have a chance to discuss the latter's paper on Ramon Llull. But this is Jaume's excuse to learn more about the student, and to ask David his views on the essay he has written. David reluctantly invites him into his flat, luxuriously furnished for a student's income. This prompts Jaume's curiosity about David's living and family background. David—who resists Jaume's intromission—is alienated by the professor's interest in salvation: he doesn't believe in any form of transcendence and totally rejects the memory of his father, a loser who believed in great ideals and committed suicide in prison. At the end of this sequence Jaume finds out about Alba's pregnancy, and David responds to Jaume's attempts to engage him

into a philosophical dilemma from Llull by destroying the disk that contained the essay.

At this point we still don't know that Jaume is gay and that he loves David. In fact, there is in *Amic/Amat* a constant tension between public persona and private conduct, between secrecy and the risk of disclosure. The role of telephone conversations and answering machines reinforces this (for example, Jaume learns that Alba is pregnant by accidentally hearing a message being left on David's machine), together with the predominance of dialogue over action and the abundance of two-shots, which emphasize the exchange of confidences but also the possibility of confrontation or violence. Furthermore, the personas of the actors cast to play the roles of Jaume and David are very distant from the usual cinematic stereotypes of gay men. Josep Maria Pou's tall, strong figure and deep voice can perhaps be more easily associated with roles such as Inspector Ferrer, a senior police detective in Antena 3's hit serial *Policías* (1999–2003). On the other hand, David Selvas, who appeared in *Nissaga de poder* (1996–98) (a soap opera in Televisió de Catalunya that obtained huge audience ratings), is again presented as a young *maudit* rebel with a grudge against the world and rough, virile manners. In the scene we are discussing, his way of walking as he opens a can of beer brings him closer to a cowboy or a working-class hero than to a sensitive young gay man, to Marlon Brando or Jean-Paul Belmondo rather than to Sal Mineo or Montgomery Cliff.

The actors' personas, I would argue, momentarily lead the audience away from focusing on gay sexuality, and this makes it possible to present Jaume's attempt at intellectual seduction as a desire for a special relationship with the student that is not necessarily (or primarily) sexual. Hence the fiction of an equal position between the two: "I judge your work, you judge mine," he proposes. This fiction entails a promise of inheritance: David is a gifted student who could continue Jaume's discipline and be his intellectual heir; he needs a *daddy* to teach him the virtues of honorable citizenship and academic excellence that make successful university professors. But David rejects the professor's advances, thus refusing the reciprocity required in the pederastic exchange (Thornton 198). David becomes suspicious and accordingly asks, "What do you want?" and "Why did you come to my apartment?" These questions express the anxieties of a culture, as Joseph Litvak puts it, "perpetually haunted (and thrilled) by the possibility that pedagogy might turn into pederasty" (1094). This resonates with the problematic status of pederasty in ancient Greece: the inequality between the partners must not lead to violation or infliction of shame (*hybris*), and this gave rise to an elaborate system for the legal protection of boys (Halperin 93). For a future citizen must not be treated

like a slave or turned into a lecherous *kinaidos*; a delicate balance had to be achieved, because the outcome of the relationship should be that the younger partner has become a noble citizen.

But this doesn't fully explain David's refusal to participate in the exchange. His problem is not the possible sexual dimension of the relationship Jaume proposes: as David constantly reminds his elders, they haven't understood a thing. The problem is, quite simply, that he refuses to be Jaume's successor: "I like your classes," he says, "but I'll never be what you and the others expect from me." David understands the situation only too well: he keeps reminding Jaume of their unequal status, thus destroying the *illusio* that might have made the pederastic exchange possible. The key to David's refusal (and to the question of the linkage between body and legacy) is in the second aspect of the Greek sexual-political legacy: the status of male prostitution.

For David supplements his grant by moonlighting as a male hustler. Jaume will find out in their second encounter, in two scenes cross-cut with a dialogue between Fanny and Alba. He has visited Pere to express his desire that Alba's child be born. When he leaves, we see him in his car, calling a contact ad. Once again, the ambiguity that sustains the permeability of the boundaries between secrecy and disclosure is shown in this sequence, as Pons is at pains to conceal the identity of the hustler. A moving shot of a boot and a motorbike wheel riding the streets of Barcelona's Eixample is followed by a shot of a parked Harley-Davidson and a man entering a building, seen from inside, wearing a helmet. He checks a piece of paper, and as he walks towards the lift, the camera follows him and focuses on his black Levi's 501-clad buttocks. Cut to Jaume working at the computer in his study. The bell rings and Jaume walks to the door, checks his appearance in the mirror, undoes a couple of buttons in his shirt, and opens the door. The attractively dressed, masculine man who arrives in his flat turns out to be David, who confirms, to the professor's embarrassment, that he is the "puto" (hustler) Jaume has contacted. As the situation becomes more sexual and tense, Jaume declares his love for David, who responds by coldly reminding him of his bodily decadence. Yet Jaume offers him "a pact": in exchange for financial help ("a scholarship," he says), David is to quit prostitution and persuade Alba to have the child. David rejects the deal, prompting Jaume to sarcastically predict for him a future as "an underwear shop assistant." David reacts violently: he beats Jaume up and destroys the computer that contains the professor's essay on Llull.

These scenes yield important effects. The disclosure of David's profession destroys the distinction between private and public that upholds social order, defines legitimate social activity, and frames the

relationship between student and teacher: as David—who defines himself as a "professional" service provider—tells Jaume, "Now you're not my professor, you're my client." This upsets the safety provided by the pederastic model as a means of patriarchal succession, and lays bare the subordination of homosexuals. Jaume, a prestigious academic, is now at risk of being publicly perceived as a figure similar to the *kinaidos* of ancient Greece (a "tieta" or "old queen," as David says),[3] while the student faces social death: as Pere later tells him, "You're worse than dead!" David Halperin explains that in Athens male prostitution was legal, but its practice was tantamount to forfeiting all citizenship rights; exercising these rights by being or having been a prostitute was an offense. Male prostitutes were not allowed to speak in the public assembly "because [their] words might not be [their] own" (98): selling one's body amounted to selling one's soul. As Bourdieu argues, masculinity is closely linked with an idea of nobility and honor (*Domination* 56–57), and male prostitution (with its potential for feminization) is the exact opposite of virile honor. David's statement "I'm a criminal!," made after beating Jaume up, is tantamount to a blanket rejection of nobility, and his refusal of the paternal role is ultimately a disavowal of the fantasy of pederasty as reproduction without a woman (Segal 12, 16), referred to in a later dialogue between Jaume and Pere. But if selling one's body amounts to selling one's soul, and if virile honor is rejected outright, it is surprising, even contradictory, that David refuses Jaume's "deal" by saying: "You can't buy me, old queen!"

This apparent contradiction is perhaps explained by Pons's emphasis on the body, which stresses the materiality of culture. The cultural legacy is present in buildings and urban spaces (Gaudí's Park Güell, the church of Santa Maria del Mar, the streets and skyline of Barcelona) and in books (Llull's *Llibre d'Amic e Amat*), but also in newer forms of data storage and transmission, such as computer disks. Here the cultural tradition is not simply abstract, spiritual, or ideological: the film focuses on the "materialitat física de l'herència textual" ("the physical materiality of the textual inheritance"); the cultural legacy is already "internalized, inscribed on the skin" (Martí-Olivella, "Ventura Pons" 384).

The ambivalences of pederasty and the violent irruption of prostitution play an important role here. They reveal the fundamental truth that, like the Catholic Church, culture is at once *casta et meretrix*, chaste and a whore. For there is a continuum between the most mercenary and the most disinterested aspects of culture, going from the venal to the useless, from the vulgar to the sublime, from pornography to philosophy. This not only creates the conditions of possibility for the material existence of culture (in that the less commercial cultural artifacts are supported by

the more commercial ones), but also opens up endless possibilities for pleasure and enjoyment. However, as with biological reproduction, the pleasures of culture require some order. Not everything is legitimate in culture, and as Bourdieu has argued, the game of culture, the existence of an autonomous cultural field, is founded on the belief that money has nothing to do with it. Cultural legitimacy is based on the "disavowal of the economy" (*Domination* 75–76).

In the film, however, the smooth, seamless, imperceptible texture of this continuum is disrupted and therefore made visible in two ways. The first has to do with education, pederasty, and prostitution. The whole edifice of education rests on the fantasy that there is no exchange of money in the pedagogical situation. This allows teachers to maintain their authority and if necessary fail their students: education is a business where the customer is not always right. For teachers do not have customers but students; they don't sell their knowledge, but offer it as a gift.

Similarly, the pederastic situation required "a kind of sublimation" (Bersani 16–17) of the adult partner's sexual desire and the erasure of the boy as an object of desire, in order to protect the latter's honor. The overt sexualization of the pederastic relationship would turn the boy into a hustler, making him unsuitable to become a citizen. But in *Amic/Amat*, the pedagogical/pederastic situation is brutally desublimated: as soon as Jaume is not the "professor" but the "client," and given that David's sole motivation is to obtain pleasure from both sex and education, then Jaume can no longer be the teacher, but merely a "service provider" who at best efficiently produces graduates for the labor market, and at worst supplies "edutainment" products for the enjoyment of his audience, whom he tries to seduce out of ignorance. And if Jaume can only have access to David's body through a fee, then the "scholarship" the former offers the latter can easily be construed not as a disinterested gift, but as an attempt to buy him out.

Second, in revealing the existence of this abject cultural continuum, the irruption of the body shows how similar David and Jaume's attitudes to cultural practice are: they both reduce cultural production and consumption to mere action. David says, "I like to fuck and read. Reading doesn't teach anything [. . .] It's just to have a good time, that's all." Jaume, on the other hand, describes his essay on Llull as "an intellectual wank." Cultural consumption is thus compared to casual sex, while production becomes a form of masturbation: both offer pleasure without any lasting consequences. The cultural practice of homosexuality therefore appears as a refusal of reproduction.

Immortal/Undead: A Chance in the Fight for the Oppressed Past

If the juxtaposition between the body and the question of the legacy is perplexing, the fact that in *Amic/Amat*—a film concerned with the cultural and biological reproduction of society—the public world has been devoid of conflict and almost erased is disconcerting. Emancipation seems irrelevant as a project: class and gender inequality, the oppression of homosexuals, and the linguistic and cultural conflict in Catalonia have all vanished from view. It is as if the end of history had been reached, and the only problems left to deal with were private, like Alba's decision whether to have the baby, or Fanny's dissatisfaction with her marriage. The "battles" Fanny refers to on the roof of Alba's apartment building, against the skyline of Barcelona, are personal ones. This world is like Fanny, who declares to be "happy," yet discovers in the utterance of the word that whatever was there, it is over.

The characters have ample control over life through medical technology and contraception. There is no god to sanction life and death, as if Catholicism had never existed in Catalonia (the Gothic church of Santa Maria del Mar, the background of Alba and Fanny's conversation, is just a monument, not a temple for collective worship). But the representation of reproduction here is almost paroxysmal: on the one hand, the survival of Jaume's world depends on Alba having her child (as if the biological reproduction of Catalan society depended on the birth of *one* specific child), and on the other, while electronic reproduction is virtually infinite, the destruction of its magnetic support means that Jaume's essay will disappear without trace. The moral dilemma over abortion and the issue of electronic reproduction both point toward Jaume's concern for immortality. He tries to persuade David to become a father, and utters the words that prompt the destruction of the computer file: "A deal. A child. The possibility that your children's children can save us both from pain. My bloody essay would finally make sense." Later, after David's second destruction of the file, Jaume suggests to Pere that Alba should keep the child: "I'd like the child to be born. Your heir, and a bit mine too. I was in love with you for years. Now I love David. And this new life that mixes both of you together. . . ."

In the same way that immortality depends on the existence and the acknowledgment of mortality, the transmission of tradition through a legacy involves the possibility of discontinuity. As Alba and Jaume insist, "nothing is for sure": whether the world we have inherited may

last is uncertain; but its futurity ultimately relies on the reproduction of the human species. For Arendt, biological birth is the primary aspect of natality, "the possibility of beginning, the potentiality which pervades every aspect of our lives" (Bowen-Moore 2). Natality is "the precondition for all communal relationships"; without reproduction of the human species, "the world itself would cease to exist as a common world (that is, the world of human affairs) and thus would be left to its natural demise" (Bowen-Moore 18). The existence of a common world is perennially at risk, and as Arendt puts it, "[t]he world's potential salvation lies in the fact that the human species regenerates itself constantly and forever" (qtd. in Bowen-Moore 31). "With each new birth," says Arendt, "a beginning is born into the world, a new world has potentially come into being" (qtd. in Bowen-Moore 52).

Yet a new beginning does not entail the abolition of the past, but its regeneration: for a beginning to be meaningful, connection with a living past and projection into the future through immortalization of its deeds are both needed. Immortalizing oneself is dependent on leaving a legacy to an heir, so that the deeds of the present are meaningful through remembrance in the future. As Arendt writes, "[h]uman deeds, unless they are remembered, are the most futile and perishable things on earth" (Arendt 84). But electronic memory, Zygmunt Bauman claims, has created a postmodern concept of immortality. If modernity sought the control over life and death through science and democratized the access to individual immortality through authorship (Bauman 155–56, 160), postmodernity brought about the Death of the Author, empiricallly manifested in the use of computers and the concomitant disappearance of the original, thus casting "a gigantic shadow on our inherited image of the writer as author" (Bauman 161). Postmodernity has replaced human memory with artificial memory, and in so doing, death "has been replaced by the disappearance act. The disappeared are *temporarily absent*; not totally absent, though—they are technically present, safely stored in the warehouse of artificial memory, always ready to be resuscitated" (Bauman 163). Thus postmodernity has created a new sense of "immortality as *virtual reality*" (Bauman 163).

The destruction of Jaume's computer file therefore entails his abolition, his absolute disappearance. For this reason, presumably, after David destroys his computer he seeks the last remaining copy of the file from Pere. But as we will see later, Jaume attains immortality purely as virtual reality: biological and electronic reproduction will merge into the refiguration of the heir as a medium, as the storage device that maintains an active virtual memory and the channel that assists in the transmission of data. However, in order to understand this rather strange aspect of

Amic/Amat, first we need to discuss the nature of Jaume's legacy, and his even stranger appeal to collective salvation.

The collective dimension of Jaume's legacy, precisely because it transcends individual immortality, sends us back to Arendt's account of the trinity of religion, tradition, and authority that lies at the foundations of the Roman-Western body politic. In this context a legacy is always the *augmentation* of the efforts made by the founders. It is therefore significant that Jaume's essay is a reading of Ramon Llull's masterpiece, *Llibre d'Amic e Amat*. Jaume Martí-Olivella rightly relates Llull's foundational role with fatherhood by describing him as "el 'pare' de l'herència cultural catalana" ("the 'father' of the Catalan cultural heritage") ("Ventura Pons" 386). But Martí-Olivella locates his subsequent discussion within Freud's Oedipal framework ("Ventura Pons" 388–89). This is understandable since the film gives homosexual desire, the absent father, and the reproductive imperative such a prominent position. A psychoanalytical reading of *Amic/Amat* would thus resonate with certain feminist accounts of the disappearance of the father in the age of electronic reproduction. For instance, Judith Roof writes:

> Organized around a series of prohibitions and exchanges, patriarchal order deploys the father's name, concepts of generation, real property, legacy, and tradition to maintain the illusion of continuity, rightly directed productivity, and meaning in its reproductive organizations. (11)

However, this approach is deeply problematic for three reasons. First, continuity is not an illusion, but an objective reality of societies, which integrate evolution and change through institutionalization and legitimation, as argued by Berger and Luckmann. Second, by its emphasis on the father, a psychoanalytic account brings authority into the private realm of the household, exactly where it does not belong, as Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari would concur. And finally, continuity is not the exclusive property of a dominant culture: we must assume that those in a subordinate position also leave legacies and wish their illegitimate traditions to continue.

The last point not only suggests that certain academic approaches are not so much subversive as suicidal (in the same way that David's refusal is suicidal); it also prompts us to question Llull's role in the film. As Arendt claims, in Rome "[t]he authority of the living was always derivative, depending [. . .] upon the authority of the founders," (122), who were dead yet continually made present through remembrance. But Llull, as Jaume says, "has very little to do with us . . . In his era he had

universal resonance, but nowadays. . . .” What authority derives from a foundation that is no longer relevant? Llull is the founder of Catalan literature, but where are all the other authors who augmented the foundations and built a bridge between Llull and us? No other Catalan author is ever mentioned in *Amic/Amat*. Is this silence meaningful? Can the broken thread of this tradition be renewed? Can the foundations be repaired? Jaume and David make a tiger’s leap into the Catalan past; but who are the enslaved ancestors?

Answering these questions requires recovering the political dimension of the narrative, whose more apparent traces are found in the sexual politics discussed earlier. This is particularly true of gender. In fact, in a film where continuity seems to fail completely, it is women who transmit a political and cultural memory. In two sequences—one shot in Gaudí’s Park Güell, the other in Alba’s student flat in the old town—Fanny confides in Alba about her own abortions and tells her anecdotes of her participation in the resistance against Franco, thus providing a link between the private and the public, between the personal and the political (an aspect entirely absent from the original play). This is visually presented through the use of high-angle shots, not so much offering an Olympian perspective on the women to reduce their stature as creating a sense of detachment and objectivity that both emphasizes the intimacy between mother and daughter and leads the audience to a more conceptual understanding of the dialogue.

The politics of sexuality in *Amic/Amat*, however, is not as straightforward. It is doubtful whether Leo Bersani’s brilliant question in *Homos*, “Should a homosexual be a good citizen?” (113), is pertinent here, unless we think there is something essentially disruptive about the structure of homosexual desire. But the film denies this view in its modeling of homosexuality on the patterns of Greek sexuality and in the apparent supersession of the gay struggle for visibility, after which homosexuality can be firmly located, once again, in the private realm.

However, the ways in which these forms of subordination interact in the film reveal their hidden or repressed political dimension. They are set in confrontation within themselves (for example, David calls Jaume “tieta” [old queen] and beats him up because he shows David’s subordination) and with each other (as in the sequence in which Jaume drives back from Pere’s flat and nearly runs over Fanny, who exclaims, without having seen who is at the wheel, “Drop dead, you queer bastard!,” in an ironical display of homophobia). Furthermore, this interplay renders visible a conflict that unfolds in the public realm and that may help us recover another story that has been completely obliterated from the field of vision: the subordination of Catalan culture.

Jaume's invocation of Llull is more than a gesture to legitimate his own authority: his insistence upon collective salvation strongly suggests that it is a return to the foundation, a gesture loaded with political signification. But the content of this gesture is difficult to spell out. To judge from the film, everything is fine in Catalan culture: no references to its precarious conditions of production and reproduction are ever made, either visually or in the dialogue, and so the language conflict and the objective reality of Catalonia's cultural and political subordination have faded from view. This is even more paradoxical if we consider that the project of a Catalan cinematography has largely failed, which has played a role in the deconstruction of the Catalan national narrative analyzed by Josep Gifreu in *El meu país* (Gifreu). Moreover, the presentation of David's refusal to accept his inheritance as a private drama is wholly contradictory with Jaume's appeal to collective salvation, and with the public, institutional framing of their relationship.

But it could be argued that, far from participating in the invisibilization of Catalan culture (an effect of its subordination), Pons makes this phenomenon visible, and therefore open to discussion, through the contradiction I have just outlined. This strategy, in fact, was very successful in Pons's first film, *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978), as I have argued elsewhere (Fernàndez). In the case of *Amic/Amat*, made twenty years later, Pons's strategy takes on different characteristics. Sharon Feldman has analyzed the trend among contemporary Catalan dramatists to avoid the representation of specific aspects, conflicts, and landscapes of Catalan society and culture; this trend, she argues, is linked both to the limitations of cultural policy in Catalonia in the 1980s and 1990s and to the desire to join a global scene and transcend the perceived limitations of the Catalan market. These dramatists, I would argue, are caught in the false dichotomy of localism vs. universalism, which is in itself an effect of cultural subordination. The conflicts portrayed in their plays are universalized to such an extent that their referents become invisible.

In much of contemporary Catalan theatre, thus, the deletion of the past as well as a conflictive present forces the critic to an oblique reading. But in his adaptations of plays, Ventura Pons retrieves and firmly reinscribes the cultural context of the plots by giving the urban landscape of Barcelona a great deal of protagonism. This is true of *Carícies* (1997) and *Morir (o no)* (1999), both based on plays by Sergi Belbel. In the case of *Amic/Amat*, one of the ways in which the film differs from Benet's play *Testament* is, according to Phyllis Zatlin, the disappearance of the "anonymous offstage voices, [. . .] along with the metaphorical level of the play" (245). However, Pons maintains Jaume's final voice-over and introduces a very significant visual device, the use of fading. In the first

shot after the credits, as the camera pans into a panoramic view of the university campus, the bodies of young students fade into the frame; later, as Fanny and Alba leave Park Güell, their figures and those of the numerous tourists fade out and vanish. The use of this filmic device can be read metaphorically as indicating the transience of the human body, in contrast to the permanence of institutions (the university) and the cultural heritage (Gaudí's architecture). However, my earlier point on the repression of conflict in Catalan cultural representation suggests an alternative reading: that the narrative of *Amic/Amat* is haunted by ghostly presences. For there is something unresolved here, an ancestral legacy of pain, invisibility, and subordination. This precarious cultural legacy—precarious because it is rejected, repressed, or not fully assumed—struggles to remain present: what characterizes this struggle is the immateriality of the legacy, which appears as a spectre speaking through a medium or haunting our bodies and our environment.

Hannah Arendt has written on the persistence of the past haunting the present (qtd. in Bowen-Moore 63–64). For her the past is not so much immortal as undead; it is made of conflict, of the pile of wreckage and suffering accumulated through history, and the effects of past subordination and domination haunt the present through the uncanny presence of ghosts. In her book *Ghostly Matters*, sociologist Avery Gordon defines haunting as a particular form of mediation whereby "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (19). Writing about subordination poses a challenge to dominant concepts of representation and visibility: "To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that [. . .] the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows" (17).

Thus I would argue that in *Amic/Amat* the use of fading (as well as of Jaume's final voice-over) gives spectrality a certain degree of objectivity. It is in this sense that the heir is a medium that channels a cultural legacy rendered irrelevant and invisible. As Jaume tells David: "Ramon Llull, segle XIII. [. . .] Has aconseguit donar-li una mica de vida. Has fet que aquell cadàver antediluvià recuperés una mica de sang. Llull parla a través teu" ("Ramon Llull, 13th century. You have managed to give him a tinge of life. You have made that antediluvian corpse recover some blood. Llull speaks through you"). David is now haunted by Llull and acts as his medium; as Jaume's heir, he is to be the professor's medium after his death. This, together with the postmodern conception of immortality as virtual reality, solves our first problem: the paradoxical juxtaposition of the body and the legacy, of reproduction and the transmission of tradition.

What I would like to suggest is that the transformation of David into a medium amounts to a monstrous form of reproduction that could be termed homosexual or vampiric, characterized by its asexual character and acting by contamination, within a pedagogical context but outside the legitimacy provided by the institution of pederasty. This becomes clear in one of the concluding sequences, David and Jaume's last meeting. The professor has retrieved from Pere the last remaining copy of the file containing his essay on Llull, and calls David. During their last conversation, Jaume wants to give his student the floppy disk as a present without any conditions attached; David initially rejects it, but Jaume provokes him by invoking the memory of his father: "Make believe it's your father's inheritance," he says. David then destroys the disk. But Jaume's reaction is unexpected: "Now you're trapped. Only you have read the essay. When I die, you'll have fragments of it mixed in your memory. A legacy. You may use it or not, but you can't reject it." Paradoxically, the (physical) destruction of the inheritance entails its transformation into the most resilient form of legacy: a memory inscribed in the body, contained within the skin. Jaume's words have become flesh. David is now inescapably haunted by his teacher; as the medium that contains and transmits Jaume's virtual memory, he has now joined the ranks of those who carry the stigma of a legacy of subordination.

This leads us to the end of the film. We witness three telephone conversations: Jaume calls his doctor to seek help to die; Alba leaves a message for David, saying that she might have the baby; David speaks to a client, and tells him that he will always be welcome, because he needs money to raise a child. The bloodcurdling last shot of the film refers us back to the credits sequence. David is preparing to receive his client: we see him in a panoramic shot of his boudoir, undressing and putting on his leather gear. Meanwhile we hear Jaume's disembodied voice: "We will not give up. We're still in time. Against whoever, we'll make it. Someday, someone will find what we want. The day will come and we'll be saved. Someone will have invented salvation. We will have invented salvation."

Walter Benjamin writes in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (247). Our enslaved ancestors are not safe not just because their memory will be perverted or obliterated if the enemy wins, but also because they are not dead. They are undead and haunt the bodies of the living, those of us who are less-than-citizens. They live in us, in our gestures, our ways of speaking and switching to the dominant language, of moving about and bowing our heads in submission and

fear. They are uncannily present in the habitus of subordination we have inherited. Hence the need for an heir who, as Jaume puts it, will come from us, but will not be like us, for her body will be that of a free citizen. To save our enslaved ancestors from pain is therefore a precondition for our own liberation. Taking on their legacy of pain, however, might prove too heavy a burden for some: the ability to bear this weight is the gravitas of the downtrodden, the sign of their authority.

As Jaume's spectral voice utters his last words, David's body—decorated with the accessories of S&M power play—fades away from the frame. On one level, the film visually stresses the transience of his body, while the material world remains; but on another level he has finally become invisible, imperceptible like all of us who are in a subordinate position. His disappearance, however, is not his abolition; rather, it marks his entrance into a realm of invisibility that connects him to a living past of domination.

Through *Amic/Amat*, Ventura Pons shows us that there is a legacy of subordination (national, social, sexual) that Catalan society needs to deal with. But this legacy is subjected to the servitudes of symbolic domination, and therefore its representation must focus on the gaps, absences, ambiguities, and paradoxes of partial visibility. Thus this legacy of exclusion from legitimate existence needs to be represented focusing on its spectral character, and this suggests the possibility of a future for Catalan culture—for the alternative is not between its existence and its disappearance. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us, "the opposite of *existence* is not nonexistence, but *insistence*: that which doesn't exist, continues to *insist*, striving towards existence" (*Welcome* 22).

The possibility of insistence makes *Amic/Amat* a radically optimistic film. It resonates with Hannah Arendt's view that "the loss of worldly permanence and reliability [. . .] does not entail [. . .] the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us" (95). The film concludes with the end of a world and a new beginning: Jaume, we are left to assume, dies having fulfilled his desire to leave a legacy; Fanny decides to go to Zaire and leave Pere, who will live to destroy David. However, Alba and David presumably will have their baby. An heir will be born: a future is possible for Jaume's world. But the heir is the illegitimate child of a male whore. Thus, the return to the foundation invoked by Jaume and Pons's emphasis on the body signal that, if the continuity of Catalan culture is to be guaranteed, its subordinate position—its exclusion from full legitimacy—must be embraced. And that, far from postulating a future of "liberated grandchildren," we must insist on remembering the ravages of the patriarchal tradition and

on challenging the authority derived from it, for it is so that new forms of legitimacy may perhaps be invented.

Notes

1. I have generally followed the translation provided in the DVD's subtitles, making changes when accuracy required it.

2. The same applies to Fanny and Alba's discussion on lesbianism. Unlike Alba, Fanny cannot conceive of a fluid sexuality that oscillates between genders: "In my time, you fucked with guys or were a lesbian. But this possibility of being now one thing, now the other, I don't. . . ." Thus a woman is a lesbian because she sleeps with women, not because she has a certain psychic configuration that makes her desire women.

3. That Jaume is at risk of being perceived as a figure akin to the *kinaidos* (the lecherous man who cannot control his desires) is proven by the rather homophobic comment of one of the reviewers: Jaume "loved, but always respected" his friend Pere (Bonet Mojica), as if homosexual desire presupposed by and in itself a lack of control, potentially leading to violation. In the film, Pere makes the same kind of suggestion, in presupposing that Jaume has acted irrationally and been unable to keep control of his desire for David, thus prompting the latter to beat up the former.

14

Imitation of Life

Transsexuality and Transtextuality in *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999)

Esteve Riambau

Right from its title, *Todo sobre mi madre* (*All About My Mother,* 1999) foregrounds one of the great recurrent themes—motherhood—of the films of Pedro Almodóvar. The film's main character is a woman who loses her son in an accident and then runs in search of his father, who abandoned her without knowing she was pregnant, in order to tell him of the young man's last wish. In her search, she crosses paths with a stage actress, a prostitute, and a nun from whom she adopts a son by the same man, a transvestite now terminally ill with AIDS. This exploration of motherhood as the basis of the family unit appears wrapped in a tone of melodrama interwoven with the textures of comedy and horror films. It surrounds itself with numerous cultural references both Spanish and international—which invoke theatre, film, and literature in order to compose the false image of a postmodern tableau.

The temptation to look for exact matches between reality and fiction vanishes quickly. While Freud casts a long shadow in *Todo sobre mi madre*, it is worth mentioning from the beginning that this is not a film

Translated by Thomas Farrell.

Fig. 14. Cecilia Roth as Manuela. Courtesy of El Deseo.

about Almodóvar's mother, who passed away shortly after the shooting. Even though this elliptical figure is a fleeting appearance in some of his earlier films such as *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?!!* (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, 1984) and *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), she cannot be identified in any of the film's many female characters. Rather, she moves through images of *Todo sobre mi madre* by way of that sublimation of reality through fiction that Almodóvar has reaffirmed ever since one of the characters of *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*, 1980) said that "the movies have nothing to do with real life. In the movies, everything is a lie."

When they lived near Badajoz, having emigrated from their hometown in La Mancha, the mother of the future filmmaker earned herself some money reading the letters of their illiterate neighbors. The young Almodóvar was surprised when she added some passages of her own invention for the sole purpose of making the letters' recipients happier. It was this memory that led the filmmaker to claim years later, in the investiture speech for an honorary doctorate from the Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, that "my mother was the place where anything could happen. From her I learned daring and something more: the need for a dose of fiction to make reality more palatable, better told, better lived.

[. . .] this is what I have done with my film scripts. I have added more than a little fiction to them. That is what film is: making the implausible seem natural and kindling intimacy and emotion in the viewer. All emotions are possible. These emotions achieved through artifice, if they are real and sincere, speak more eloquently of me and my world than I can myself. The emotions are very real, even though the language may be artificial" (Almodóvar 18–20).

Just One Mother?

The exploration of emotions and the overlap between implausibility and naturalism effectively define the territory that *Todo sobre mi madre* inhabits. The emotional journey of Manuela, the main character, passes through four stages: the flight of the transvestite whose child she is bearing after having accepted his transsexuality; her son's death; her adoption of the son born to a nun, who dies during childbirth, following the nun's relationship with the same transvestite; and, finally, the death of the father, a victim of AIDS. So two births and three deaths make up the biological cycle that Almodóvar proposes through three characters who share the same name—this Esteban who is later called Lola and his two sons by different mothers. In the end, the film reestablishes an emotional equilibrium that, according to the filmmaker, "evokes the variety of families that are possible at the close of the twentieth century. If there is anything that characterizes our time, it is precisely the breakup of the family. Now it is possible to create a family with other members, other biological relationships" (Strauss 37).

A priest, a nun, and a tiger (*Entre tinieblas—Dark Habits*, 1983); the mother who, after killing her husband, adopts a girl with telekinetic powers (*¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?!!*); or the triangle made up of a young man, his stepfather, and the lover who replaces his dead mother (*Kika*, 1993), are a few of the nontraditional family models that precede the ones Manuela faces in *Todo sobre mi madre*. Under the symbolic presence of Gaudí's Sagrada Família temple, she arrives in Barcelona to find the mother-son relationship between two lesbian actresses of different ages, and Rosa's middle-class family, made up of a mother who forges paintings and an amnesic father. It is no accident that the only fully male character in *Todo sobre mi madre* is played by Fernando Fernán Gómez, the reputed author of *El extraño viaje* (*Strange Voyage*, 1964), a black comedy in which sexual frustration is woven through a macabre murder, and which Almodóvar considers one of his favorite works in the history of Spanish cinema.[1]

Manuela's "strange family" in *Todo sobre mi madre*, the one that will finally bring her stability, is formed by replacing her biological son with another one born to a nun and the first boy's father. This transference becomes a way of healing the wounds caused by the boy's death. It belongs more to soap operas than to a feature-length melodrama, and it awakens emotions while reaffirming the disdain Almodóvar has always shown toward biological motherhood. The lyrics to the song "Voy a ser mamá" ("I'm Going to Be a Mommy") (Holguín 268), written by the filmmaker and sung by him, along with Fanny McNamara, in the eighties during the period of the "Madrid Scene," say:

> Yes, I'm going to be a mommy.
> I'm going to have a baby.
> So I can play with him,
> So I can exploit him good.
>
> I'm going to be a mommy.
> I'm going to have a baby.
> I'll dress him like a woman,
> I'll plaster him to the wall.
> I'll call him Lucifer,
> I'll teach him to criticize,
> I'll teach him to live by prostitution
> I'll teach him to kill.
> Yes. I'm going to be a mommy.

Almodóvar's early films also include this furious rejection of biological motherhood. In *Laberinto de pasiones* (*Labyrinth of Passion*, 1982) the character Toraya—a parody of the Empress of Persia—is reputedly sterile. In one scene, which takes place in the waiting room of a fertility specialist, she has the following conversation with a patient and her test-tube daughter:

> WOMAN: Children don't bring happiness. I'm sorry I ever took this step.
>
> TORAYA: How can you say that when you have such a precious little girl?
>
> WOMAN: This girl will be the death of me!
>
> TORAYA: Don't say that in front of her!
>
> WOMAN: She doesn't care. She's used to it by now.

TORAYA: (*addressing the girl, who is about nine years old*): Your mom exaggerates a lot.

GIRL: Well, her nerves are shot.

WOMAN: What a mouth she has . . . !

TORAYA: Is this the test-tube girl? Oh, forgive me!

WOMAN: No, no, I'm used to it.

TORAYA: Is the girl completely normal?

WOMAN: I suppose so, except that she's a monster.

TORAYA: My god, don't say that, when the poor thing is so bright.

WOMAN: No, she's certainly not dumb, but I've had it up to my ass with her!

TORAYA: Besides there are lots of men who love test-tube children.

The repertoire of rejections made by various Almodóvar mothers continues in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?!!* with the single immigrant mother that hates her daughter who has telekinetic powers and with the housewife who, after killing her husband with a ham bone, decides to improve her family's finances by giving her youngest son, who has homosexual tendencies, to a rich dentist who is clearly a pederast. The possessive mother of the rapist in *Matador* (1986) or the singer from *Tacones lejanos* (*High Heels*, 1991) who puts her professional career before her relationship with her daughter are other significant specimens in the gallery of maternal monsters that Almodóvar has assembled with borrowed elements. Literature such as Sophocles's *Electra*, Federico García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba,* and Simone de Beauvoir's *La mère* as well as the films *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959) and *Autumn Sonata* (Ingmar Bergman, 1978) are some of the influences that echo in the heart of *High Heels*, a work whose most original aspect is the incorporation of a transvestite who imitates the main female character in a cabaret. As in *Todo sobre mi madre*, this sexually ambiguous character lives a double life—judge by day, femme fatale by night—and also leaves a woman pregnant before she finally reconciles with her mother.

Later, and especially starting with *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?!!*, the rejection of motherhood in Almodóvar's films leads to the reframing of family relationships built on violence. The main character

of *¡Átame!* (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, 1990) is a porno actress and drug addict kidnapped by a psychopath rather like the one in *The Collector* (William Wyler, 1965). He tries to form a family unit with his victim under the complacent eye of Almodóvar, who received severe criticism from feminist quarters.[2] Other films present rape as a chance happening or even as therapy. When one of the characters in *Matador* admits to being a rapist, the female police officer interrogating him responds, "some girls have all the luck." The protagonist in *Kika* is repeatedly assaulted by a mentally challenged man named Paul Bazzo ("Polvazo" in Spanish, meaning "Big Fuck") and, in *Hable con ella* (*Talk to Her*, 2002), a nurse aptly named Benigno (Benign), violates a patient who is comatose—an even more defenseless state than that of *¡Átame!*'s main character—and the resulting pregnancy brings this woman back to life.

Manuela, the main character of *Todo sobre mi madre*, lives in this context associated with the most popular tendencies of melodrama. She is undoubtedly the most touching of Almodóvar's mothers because, not by chance, she has given birth to an artist, the young writer who pulls the strings of a narrative set in motion by his diary. It is he who, through his final paragraphs ("I want to know you, no matter who you are or how you've treated my mother. Nobody can take that right away from me"), propels his mother to undertake her journey in search of the original trauma, which she overcomes after the death of the father. This allows her to start a new life based on the substitution of the biological son by the adopted one. Rosa, the nun who took care of the transvestite Lola and is now pregnant with his son, accepts that Manuela passes herself off as her sister, and she becomes a surrogate mother so that Manuela can rediscover happiness on the fringes of biology. Once Manuela's son and little Esteban's mother are both dead, the biological power of the new family rests entirely in the transvestite, a body that imitates a woman's but retains a man's ability to inseminate and calls into question "the categories of masculine and feminine, whether they are considered natural or constructed, biological or cultural" (Garber 10).

The Exaltation of Imposture

This exaltation of imposture, this triumph of the artificial over the natural, has numerous precursors in the films of Almodóvar. It culminates in *Todo sobre mi madre* with a mise-en-scène that combines theatrical performances with an aesthetic that eschews realism. The work of Brazilian cinematographer Affonso Beato is based on tones of red and blue, which are identified with reality and its representation, respectively. It tends toward

sterilization, and in certain passages, such as the writing of Esteban's diary and his death, the camera adopts the audience's subjective point of view. The filmmaker explicitly inserts diverse performances into the context of reality while making truth emerge from the world of theatre. In the opening scene, Manuela confesses to her son that she quit being an actress in order to work as a nurse. As a member of a heart transplant unit she revives a scene that Almodóvar had already included in *La flor de mi secreto* (*The Flower of My Secret*, 1995): to play the member of a donor's family in a professional workshop. Soon after, the death of her son—in an accident he has while trying to get the autograph of a theatre actress—forces her to take on this same character in real life. Paradoxically, her performance turns out to be much more dramatically effective in the make-believe situation than in the real one.

After she comes to terms with the idea that the body in which her son's heart is now beating no longer belongs to him, Manuela again switches roles and the nurse returns to the stage in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the play she once performed alongside her husband. Naturally she takes the role of Stella, the woman who in this version of the play—unlike the original one—abandons her husband once she has the son she wanted from him. For Manuela, fiction becomes reality, and the two trajectories meet for the first time when she bursts into the dressing room of Huma Rojo, the actress who has involuntarily triggered her son's fatal accident. Shortly before his death, Esteban and Manuela see *All About Eve* together but, unlike the lies that Eve Harrington tells to the character played by Bette Davis to win her acceptance in Mankiewicz's movie, Manuela relates a story that is absolutely true and far more preposterous than any fiction.

This play of truth and lies is reproduced in other characters in *Todo sobre mi madre*. The mother of Rosa, the nun who resigns from her missionary work in El Salvador because she is pregnant by a transvestite, is a middle-class lady who forges Chagall paintings. The truth, however, comes out in the monologue of Agrado, a transvestite who takes the stage when Huma and Nina, the two main actresses of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, are not feeling well. Agrado is a working-class character whose only acting experience has been in prostitution—another form of pretending—but s/he assumes the challenge of appearing on stage facing an audience that expects a Tennessee Williams play. Instead, s/he recites a monologue, a challenge that, according to Almodóvar, is "the exclusive privilege of the greatest actors." Agrado was inspired by a real transvestite whom Almodóvar met during the Parisian nights of the early seventies, but far from the Mark Antony of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, s/he renounces fiction and clings instead to the most prosaic reality: the one determined

by her budget for the surgical procedures that have transformed her body. His/her reality is defined by her confession that "one becomes more real the more she resembles herself as she has dreamed it."

Shortly after, reality again bursts out of fiction when the actor playing the brutal Kowalski in Williams's play solicits sexual favors from Agrado, who rejects him in the dressing room. Even more than in this explicit scene, this male role, which was played by Marlon Brando on stage as well as in Elia Kazan's film version, is associated in *Todo sobre mi madre* with Lola, the transvestite who has left both Manuela and Rosa pregnant. Almodóvar took the inspiration from another real person, a transvestite who would not let his wife wear a miniskirt, even while he sunbathed in a bikini and—at forty-five years of age—prostituted himself along with his son of twenty, to whom he had given silicon breast implants as a birthday present. As bizarre as the fiction can seem in the films of Almodóvar, it is just an imitation of life.

Three Actresses and a Play

However, *Todo sobre mi madre* not only incorporates emotions distilled from reality. Like most of Almodóvar's films, it is filled with more or less explicit references related to the notion of postmodernity that is usually applied to the filmmaker. The opening scene, in which mother and son watch *All About Eve* on television right after a commercial for diapers, justifies the film's title and offers some clues that later scenes corroborate, and which the final dedication applies to a much broader cast of characters: "To Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider . . . to all the actresses who have played actresses, to all women who act, to the men who act and become women, to every one who wants to be a mother. To my mother."

Let us look at each of these in turn. In addition to the transvestites ("men who act and become women") and a double reference to his mother—one explicit and another to the woman who made up parts of other people's letters, implied in the dedication to "all women who act"—Almodóvar dedicates *Todo sobre mi madre* to three "actresses who have played actresses." "The spirit of these three impregnates the characters of *Todo sobre mi madre* with smoke, alcohol, desperation, insanity, desire, ransacking, frustration, loneliness, vitality, and understanding," adds Almodóvar in the press book for the film before broadening his tribute to include "many other actresses who have also played actresses in movies: Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*, Judy Garland in *A Star is Born*, Lana Turner in *The Bad and the Beautiful* and *Imitation of Life*,

Ava Gardner in *The Barefoot Contessa*, Fassbinder's *Veronica Voss*, Julianne Moore in *Vanya on 42nd Street*." The list goes on, but the three women cited in the film are enough to appreciate the filmmaker's models and how he uses them.

After a brilliant career as the lead in the soap-operatic film *Sissi, die junge Kaiserin*, Romy Schneider had a second career playing dramatic roles that foreshadowed her suicide. In *L'important c'est d'aimer* (Andrzej Zulawski, 1974), she plays an actress who makes erotic films—like Victoria Abril in *¡Átame!*—and awakens the compassion of a photographer. Almodóvar uses this French film as a model to fashion the young writer who weaves the threads of the plot of *Todo sobre mi madre* and also to generate the spectacle of the theatre—here a version of *Richard III*—in which fiction is confused with reality. Finally, *L'important c'est d'aimer* inspires in Almodóvar a surplus of passions ranging from lies, as in the filming of the scene in which the actress must feign arousal while straddling the bloody body of a dead man, to the real reunion with the lover who has been beaten by the gangster who lent him the money to produce the play.

Gena Rowlands also played an actress in *Opening Night* (John Cassavetes, 1978), and her blond hair serves as a model for the characterization of Marisa Paredes. From this film, Almodóvar also borrows the scene of the son's death in *Todo sobre mi madre*. In *Opening Night*, the star is set upon by autograph hounds while leaving the theatre in heavy rain after a show. When one of them comes up to knock on the car window, the actress moves to help her, but the vehicle pulls away, and another car runs the fan over. Unlike in *Todo sobre mi madre*, the actress orders the driver to stop the car and shows concern for the victim, whose ghost follows her over the next few months through a situation that straddles the limits between reality and hallucination, using the theme of the double.

In addition to the final dedication, Bette Davis appears explicitly in other passages of *Todo sobre mi madre*. In the opening scene in which Manuela and her son get ready to watch *All About Eve*, Almodóvar uses the occasion to justify the film's title, since Mankiewicz's work opened in Spain as *Eva al desnudo* (*Naked Eve*). Later, the stage actress played by Marisa Paredes earns her name—Huma Rojo (Red Smoke)—because of her addiction to tobacco at an early age. As she says, "It's Bette Davis's fault that I started smoking." Finally, when Manuela ends up playing the role of Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* because of the personal crisis of Nina, a heroine addict, Nina later reproaches her for being "just like Eve Harrington," the character in *All About Eve* who climbs socially and professionally at her mentor's expense. Almodóvar underlines these similarities when he notes in the press book for *Tacones lejanos* that his dialogue is not naturalistic because "my model would be closer to Mankiewicz (if I

may presume to say so)." Nevertheless, the protagonist of *Todo sobre mi madre* is not a climber; for her, the theatre is neither a springboard to fame nor a means of artistic expression—"I'm used to lying"—but rather a vehicle for traveling toward the origin of her trauma.

These three films make up a good part of the dramatic underpinnings of *Todo sobre mi madre*—including the world of the theatre, the overlap between reality and fiction, and the trauma caused by an accidental death. But Almodóvar's film also makes other explicit artistic references. Boris Vian, the height of the masochism of creativity offered by Truman Capote in the preface to *Music For Chameleons* ("When God hands you a gift, he also hands you a whip; and the whip is intended solely for self-flagellation," Capote xi), Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), the modernist buildings of Gaudí in Barcelona, the physical deformities suggested by *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1980), the paintings of Marc Chagall, and the theatre of García Lorca (in the new play being rehearsed by Huma Rojo), are some of the cultural items that *Todo sobre mi madre* invokes, continuing a practice that the filmmaker had already used in previous films.

In the story *El mapa* ("The Map"), Almodóvar has said about *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a play used for the bearded lady's monologue in *Pepi, Lucy, Bom*: "I responded more to Tennessee Williams on the lips of Liz Taylor, Paul Newman, and Marlon Brando than to the thick, drooling whispers of my spiritual adviser, and that was something beyond my control" (Almodóvar, *Patty Diphusa* 174). *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946) in *Matador*, the unforgettable dialogue of *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1953) in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, and the allusions to *Rich and Famous* (George Cukor, 1981) included in *La flor de mi secreto* are other illustrious examples from classic Hollywood films that confirm Almodóvar's practice of lifting references from others. "They are part of history. [. . .] They are instrumental elements of film," says the filmmaker (Altares 21). But *Todo sobre mi madre* puts them on the same level with the original text of Tennessee Williams, which plays over the speakers in the dressing room, and which first Manuela and later Agrado repeat and memorize mechanically in hopes of being able to make it their own one day.

High and Low Culture

Todo sobre mi madre can be seen as a compendium of crisscrossing Spanish and international references that transcend its closed nature to make up what Gérard Genette defines as transtextuality. However, its essence is

not limited to those references that Almodóvar makes explicit. Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva assert that intertextuality is an epistemological statute of all discourse, but the films of Almodóvar transcend these limits to inscribe themselves within the realm of a postmodernity that "manifests itself through heterogeneity, fragmentation, a taste for excessive quotation, the impossibility of bringing texts to a close" (Sánchez-Biosca, *Una cultura* 57).

As part of the so-called Madrid Scene of the eighties, Almodóvar's first films echoed the trend of camp, imported from New York homosexual circles, through three characteristics that Newton has defined as humor, incongruence—in the sense of a juxtaposition of disparate elements—and theatricality. Parody, one of the defining elements of postmodernity, would lend itself in Almodóvar's early works to a revitalization of the grotesque in the spirit of the theatre of Valle-Inclán, filtered now through both the Spanish humorists of the twenties and thirties (Miguel Mihura, Edgar Neville, Enrique Jardiel Poncela, and Wenceslao Fernández Flórez) and a later cinematic culture associated with Luis Buñuel, Luis García Berlanga, Marco Ferreri, and Fernando Fernán Gómez. It is these precursors who will enable him to undertake "the revision of the Spanish cultural legacy, building on several central ideas: first, through the privileged use of a whole series of materials salvaged from the wreckage of pop culture—from the *fotonovela* to the bolero, from comic books to the *sainete* (sketch comedy of local customs), from variety songs to Hollywood musicals, from pop music to the outlandish and carnivalesque paraphernalia of punk—all of which, duly subjected to a process of 'sterilization,' was used to create new meanings" (Zunzunegui, *Historias de España* 168).

This "erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson 14) is confirmed with the international success of *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* and the crossover of Almodóvar's films from the art-house circuit to the general public. This is the moment, at the start of the road to the Oscars for *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Hable con ella*, when the filmmaker's postmodernity moves from parody to pastiche, understood here as a collage of styles, forms, and concepts that have lost all historical reference. For this reason, Almodóvar's work also confirms Jameson's opinion—seconded by Habermas—that postmodernity is deeply reactionary. The "cannibalism" with which Alejandro Yarza defines Almodóvar's work—in the best critical essay so far on the Spanish filmmaker—then evolves, according to the dichotomy suggested by Foster, from the postmodernism of "resistance" to one of "reaction," the one that in the course of repudiating modernism and celebrating postmodernism, in fact returns "to the verities of tradition" (Foster ix–xvi).

Almodóvar's voracious, unconventional appetite for assembling materials from very different sources in his early films becomes more restricted in scenes that are models of proper narrative behavior, in which characters find themselves obliged to behave according to preexisting codes, which are often coarsely stated. The title character in *Matador*, who enters the cinema where *Duel in the Sun* is playing before Almodóvar's film cannibalizes King Vidor's ending, or the rhetorical allusions to *Autumn Sonata* that underline the friction between mother and daughter in *Tacones lejanos,* move away from the idea of recycling, which "consists in using preexisting forms in an 'intelligent' way, making it clear that the quotes are completely intentional and addressed to a savvy audience that knows how to 'recognize and appreciate' such quotes" (Jullier 7). In contrast, both examples come close to the notion of the quote as "merely an identical restatement of something," which "only reproduces the model and thereby contributes to the perpetuation of the frames of reference in a communicative world." As a result, "the reader/viewer easily gets the feeling that everything is a reference, a quote, a rewrite, a remake, a repetition" (Negri 89–90).

The Legacy of Patty Diphusa

In light of its explicit references, *Todo sobre mi madre* inscribes itself squarely inside a notion of pastiche that values "high" culture over "low" culture. Williams, Capote, Cassavetes, and Mankiewicz abet this imbalance, but they cannot hide the lurking presence of other references that date from the period when Almodóvar, dressed in a housecoat, with curlers in his hair and knee-high stockings, sang *Voy a ser mamá* alongside Fanny McNamara. Before Manuela's son shows his literary vocation in *Todo sobre mi madre*, the transvestite Patty Diphusa (Almodóvar's alter-ego and the main character in his stories published in the early eighties in the magazine *La Luna*, the cultural mouthpiece of the Madrid Scene) had already warned: "Like almost all the other women in my situation, even though I haven't written a single line, I have always felt like a writer" (Almodóvar, *Patty Diphusa* 16).

Preceded by Carmen Maura in *La ley del deseo* (*Law of Desire*, 1987) and Miguel Bosé in *High Heels*, Lola and Agrado—the two transvestites who appear in *Todo sobre mi madre*—also have wider resonance in Almodóvar's universe. In "La chica que se parecía a Spencer Tracy," one of the stories included in *Patty Diphusa y otros textos* (Almodóvar 61), "Adela had become Juan Félix, I mean shortly after leaving school she changed sex because she was madly in love with me and she knew that

I preferred guys." Previously, Almodóvar had already said in "Escarlata O'Hara, una manchega perfecta"—a text originally published in *Diario 16* in 1988—that "those who believe *La ley del deseo* is an autobiographical film are mistaken. The movie that really talks about me had already been made long before *La ley* . . . was filmed. That film was called *Gone with the Wind*. The character who plays me is not Mammy, as some detractors will say, but rather Scarlet. [. . .] It is easy to see Scarlet as a male character played by a woman" (Almodóvar, *Patty Diphusa* 130).

In addition to these scattered references, *Todo sobre mi madre* basically feeds on two other stories that come from the already-mentioned adventures of Patty Diphusa, originally published in *La Luna* between 1983 and 1984. The protagonist of "Escroto sobre el viento" ("Scrotum on the Wind"), a title that parodies that of a Douglas Sirk melodrama (*Written on the Wind*, 1956), is a Spanish woman who has a black son with an American sergeant stationed at a military base near Madrid. She is forced to go to Germany to work as a maid, like Rosa when she gets pregnant by a transvestite and contracts AIDS, which changes her plans to travel to El Salvador, compromises her relationship with her family, and sends her into hiding along with Manuela. In Almodóvar's story, the protagonist asks herself, "How am I going to explain this to my mother? She'll discover that I'm a call girl, that I pay my rent with my pussy. I'll have to leave everything, leave Spain, go where nobody knows about my present. I'll have to become a maid. If only the kid were white" (Almodóvar, *Patty Diphusa* 165). In fact, behind this story, recycled in *Todo sobre mi madre*, lies another film by Sirk, but it is not *Written on the Wind*. Rather, it is *Imitation of Life* (1959), a melodrama in praise of imposture, focused on an actress who hires a black maid whose daughter tries to pass for white. The relationship between a white prostitute, a Yankee soldier of color, and their son had, in turn, already been explored by Francisco Regueiro—another Spanish filmmaker close to the tradition of the grotesque—in *Si volvemos a vernos* (*If We See Each Other Again*, 1967), a film produced in the wake of the New Spanish Cinema of the sixties.

In *Todo sobre mi madre*, Manuela's problematic motherhood is fruit of an atypical relationship, drifting toward the exploration of two other nuclear families: the pair of lesbian actresses who hire her as a secretary, and Rosa's parents, who refuse to hire her as a cook until she becomes the adoptive mother of their grandson. Both situations, more than from Mankiewicz or Sirk, derive from another adventure of Patty Diphusa entitled "Un episodio burgués" ("A Bourgeois Episode"). Here, the transsexual has a relationship with a rich teenager and turns him into her lover and secretary until they fight, break up, and she goes back to a

taxi driver who resembles Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947). When the young man brings Patty Diphusa home to meet his mother, as Rosa does with Manuela in *Todo sobre mi madre*, the transvestite has the following conversation with her:

> "If you knew my friends, you'd be surprised how flexible I am compared to them, but that doesn't mean that I don't worry about my son. He's all I have. [. . .] Taking care of him is enough for me. But of course, you wouldn't be able to understand that since you're a transvestite and will never be able to have children."
>
> I thought I hadn't heard her right.
>
> "I beg your pardon?"
>
> "Oh, don't look so surprised. Science hasn't advanced that far yet, sweetie."
>
> And she smiled, very pleased with the backwardness of science.
>
> "Madam, I've got more than enough pussy and men to make a whole tribe of children if I weren't being careful." (Almodóvar, *Patty Diphusa* 79)

Fifteen years after the publication of this story, Lola—in *Todo sobre mi madre*—turns the dream of Almodóvar's alter ego into a reality. She has the two sons that make Manuela's life seem like a melodrama inserted into "high culture," although in fact it is not so distant from the tone of Almodóvar's first film. *Todo sobre mi madre* would be a sophisticated remake of *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, considering that Almodóvar's first work has been defined as "an authentic *patchwork*, or to put it in more traditional terms, a truly fragmented body composed of bits and pieces taken from here and there. [. . .] The film owes its Frankestein-like nature as much to the variety of universes that it borrows from various genres, as to the surprising way in which the pieces that make up this new entity are put together. This composite object is the product of the hybridization of primordial melodrama, using a whole series of grafts taken from the most unthinkable domains" (Zunzunegui, *Historias de España* 168).

A Mixing of Genres

Just like some of his characters, the films of Almodóvar are the fruit of mixing genres. In broad strokes, his comedy would open ever-widening holes in its trajectory toward the introduction of the melodrama, in a path that also meets up with the detective story (*Matador*, *Carne trémula—Live*

Flesh, 1997) and the so-called popular subgenres of local color (the serial, the situation comedy, the *españolada*).

Todo sobre mi madre includes a fair number of those primary attributes of melodrama that are associated with stories where the main characters are women who play the roles of victims at the heart of moral conflicts. These women are involved in chance events and meetings and in dramatic complications of the plot. However, Almodóvar, unlike filmmakers such as Sirk and Fassbinder, does not respect the genre's integrity. True to Almodóvar's cinematographic origins in comedy, his melodramas participate in a longstanding tradition of genre promiscuity. During the Golden Era, Hollywood had already developed this tradition in an attempt to boost the commercial appeal of its movies by attracting various potential audiences at the same time. Almodóvar's films, however, "assume spectatorial competence in diverse generic codes; they are calculated deviations meant to be appreciated by discerning connoisseurs" (Stam 210).

The Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante has used the neologism "Almodrama," and the filmmaker himself, in the press book for *Todo sobre mi madre*, coins the term "Screwball Drama" to define the "outrageous, baroque drama with extreme characters battered by fate (without it becoming a big puppet show or a drama of the grotesque)." The impurity of this film as melodrama comes, first and foremost, from its contamination by comedy, driven by the character of Agrado. The transvestite acts simultaneously as a counterpoint to Manuela and as a positive antagonist to Lola. S/he also serves as comic relief during the film's most tense dramatic situations. His/her function is not a new one in Almodóvar's work. The musical number of the female inmates in *Tacones lejanos* has already been inserted into a context typical of film noir, "as if the viewer were being invited not to take too seriously the experiences and the dramatic tone adopted by the film up to that point" (Negri 38). Also, as we have seen, the rapes in *Matador* and *Kika* have the status of derisive comments.

In his first appearance in *Todo sobre mi madre*, Agrado laughs at the wounds s/he has received during a sexual assault—"I look like the Elephant Man." S/he sums up his/her life's path in a humorous tone: "When I was young, I was a truck driver. Then I left the truck and became a whore." S/he points out the persistence of his manhood in the body of a woman ("As if my cock was the only one"), reclaims authenticity from within imposture ("the more she resembles herself as she has dreamed it") and repeats ad nauseam that his/her name is appropriate to the vocation of pleasing others. Agrado (literally, "Pleasure") is, for Almodóvar, the good transvestite that contrasts with the devastating effects of Lola. S/he is the friendly face of a melodrama that flirts with comedy and culminates in

a register borrowed from horror films. Esteban/Lola is the great absence in the film. Manuela has erased him from her life; their son wants to meet him; Agrado has nursed him through his drug addiction; and Rosa has gotten pregnant by him while fatally contracting AIDS. It is at this precise moment that Lola makes her physical appearance during the supposed climax of *Todo sobre mi madre*: in the cemetery, dressed in black, leaning on a cane and hidden behind the mask of flamboyant feminine makeup that is a sign of a transvestitism whose nature as "residue that can't be assimilated within the phallic norm gives him a dimension that is animal, monstruous" (Yarza 90). "You're not a human being," Manuela reproaches him. "You're an epidemic."

Lola, like Norman Bates's mother in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), is the overwhelming representation of death that erupts into the world of the living. Like Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950)—another of the films cited explicitly by Almodóvar as a source of inspiration for *Todo sobre mi madre*—she is the image of a past as she descends the stairs like a diva from another time who feels that she is about to disappear and is preparing to be immortalized. But whereas Gloria Swanson relies on cinema for her immortality, Lola pins his/her hopes on the son he has conceived with Rosa. Just as the protagonist of *¡Átame!* plays her own role in a B horror movie after seeing *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968), Lola is another of the "living dead," the Almodovarian ghost who materializes physically to confirm the necrophilic nature of a camp aesthetic which, as Yarza points out, "brings back to life the corpses of history" (Yarza 133).

Unlike the protagonist of *Kika*, who takes on the qualities of Dr. Frankenstein to revive her lover after an attack of catalepsy brought on by the death of his mother and then gives him an electrical shock to bring him back to life after discovering that his mother didn't love him, Lola is associated with Benigno, the nurse in *Hable con ella*, who only dies after first resuscitating one of his patients from a coma by means of a pregnancy resulting from a rape. The pregnancies of Manuela and Rosa in *Todo sobre mi madre* are consensual, but they make Lola resemble not so much Dr. Frankenstein as his monster, incapable of controlling his impulses and prepared to sacrifice himself to restore order, which he himself has undone, through a legacy that redeems him. While the first of his sons is a writer, the second miraculously neutralizes the AIDS antibodies he has inherited from his father. Manuela's adopted son, then, will not be a diabolical double of the one engendered by John Cassavetes' character in *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), but rather an admirable child who contrasts with Nina's biological son, whom Agrado calls "a fat and horrid child, really ugly." From its postmodern—and

therefore fragmentary—nature, *Todo sobre mi madre* glorifies the figure of the transvestite through the structure of a Frankenstein creature with a body of melodrama and transplants from comedy, which turn it into a monster out of a horror movie.

Travels with Manuela

The itinerary that Manuela follows in order to replace her biological son with an adoptive one necessarily passes through extensive territories inhabited by psychoanalysis. Unlike other films by Almodóvar, which are much more neatly associated with the canonical version of the Oedipus complex, *Todo sobre mi madre* divides the two father figures between the old amnesiac who cannot recognize his daughter Rosa, and the transvestite Lola, father of the two sons through whom s/he lives on. The first son is a writer in the making who feels the need to know his father because, as Lacan says, "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support and the symbolic function which, from the dawn of time, has associated his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan 67). Esteban, as a writer who has turned to symbolic language, needs to know his father in order to link him with a name that might reestablish the family unit that was ripped from his mother's photograph, and which he will never see completed. The second son will never meet his father either, because now it is the father who has died, after replacing his original name, the masculine Esteban, with that of the feminine Lola.

At once father and mother, the transvestite denies the separation of the son from the mother's body and becomes a fetish, the object that hides the threatening wound that will cover the mother's lack of a phallus. In the film, Lola assumes the external signs that define the female without erasing her own male sexuality and, in this way, "transcends the opposition between mother and father, between desire and repression, between the ahistorical, acultural, unrepresentable space of the female and the historical, cultural, dominant, exclusive space of the male" (Yarza 97).

At the beginning of the film, Esteban sets out on a search aimed at restoring the absent father. The search starts with a photograph of Manuela, whose other half is missing, and ends with the phantasmagoric appearance of Lola, terminally ill, masked behind sunglasses and bearing a cane like blind Oedipus, who was forced to wander in the desert after killing his father and sleeping with his mother. The trajectory that unites the two moments passes through various stages, starting with the trip that Manuela and Lola—at that time Esteban—made from Buenos Aires to Barcelona, and following with Esteban's escape to Paris to undergo

the surgical procedure that would turn him into Lola, and the other trip that Manuela makes from Madrid to A Coruña for the purpose of attending another operation, the transplanting of her son's heart into a cardiac patient.

"Nothing dies completely, everything is passed on" (Lalanne 35). In this way, Esteban's diary will reach his father, his heart will beat in another body, Lola's illness will kill Rosa but allow Manuela to have another son, and Agrado will replace Manuela as Huma's assistant, while the actress becomes the final depository of Esteban's photograph. However, only the travel between Madrid and Barcelona leads through explicitly Freudian tunnels that link the past with the present, rejection with searching, pain with happiness, and truth with its appearance.

Manuela starts the film as a nurse only to return to her former life as an actress**,** and she replaces her biological son with an adoptive one who, in turn, comes from the same past that she was trying to forget when she fled from Barcelona to Madrid the first time. Her return to the capital of Catalonia means reviving old friendships until she finds the Father whose identity Esteban will never know. If the protagonist of *Kika* discovers in her mother's diaries that she only mentions her "to say she was sick of my presence," the young writer in *Todo sobre mi madre* dies without knowing that his father was a transvestite.

The film begins with the flow of the serum that nourishes a patient in a coma, before his heart is transplanted into another body. Shortly after, death breaks the umbilical chord that unites Manuela with her son, and his heart will beat in another person. In the end, the only connection between Manuela and her adopted son is the ghost of the common father. Biologically, Manuela is no longer a mother; she only acts as though she were, just as she had before in the theatre and in the hospital. The birth of Rosa's son has demanded her sacrifice in order to provide a "happiness" that is foreign to her, based on the swapping of roles. Manuela adopts Rosa's son, and Huma, who has replaced Nina with Agrado, ends up with the photo of Esteban that Lola gave her before dying. Almodóvar's films imitate life, but they need ever more sophisticated silicon implants to simulate reality.

Notes

1. Toward the end of 2003, Pedro Almodóvar selected this film for a TVE (Spanish public TV) program entitled *Versión española*, presented by Cayetana Guillén Cuervo, one of the actresses who appears in *Todo sobre mi madre*. Following the broadcast of *El extraño viaje*, he held a colloquium with Fernando Fernán Gómez and sang the praises of that film, one of his favorites in the history of Spanish cinema.

2. "The reactionary, macho, and atavistic nature of Almodóvar's movie is not the theme, but rather the way he presents it: the complacency of the delight in this attitude of men towards women, and the complacency of the 'amusement' that Almodóvar finds in female masochism, his use of pain as a vehicle for romance. [. . .] The woman who is kidnapped, tied up, and raped falls in love with her captor. She takes on fully the role of object and masochist: she falls in love by pain, humiliation, and ridicule" (Peri Rossi 32).

15

The Construction of the Cinematic Image

En construcción

(José Luis Guerín, 2000)

Joan Ramon Resina

We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

As the most distinguished heir to the School of Barcelona—a group of experimental filmmakers of the 1970s, which included Pere Portabella and the early Carlos Saura—José Luis Guerín is Spain's subtlest explorer of cinematic language. Like those precursors but with greater intuition and technical expertise, he displays a royal indifference to the popularizing themes and exportable glamor that have brought commercial success to some Spanish directors.[1] Indifferent, like other Catalan filmmakers, to the call for a national cinema or the representation of the national in cinema,[2] Guerín territorializes his subjects in opaque corners of various geographies and focuses on the passage of time, which commercial cinema compresses and thus effaces from the image. Shunning both the limitations of localism and the vacuity of the "transnational," he raises the visual subject matter to the level of epistemic considerations on the

Fig. 15. Iván and Juani. Courtesy of Ovideo TV.

agency of time, the erosion of the material basis of culture, and the dissolution of experience.

To ask about the national significance of *En construcción* (*Work in Progress*) is to ask the wrong question. Although Guerín deals with social and historical aspects that *can* be analyzed in terms of the national and the global, his films are above all an extended Kantian meditation on cinema's conditions of possibility. Like other Catalan artists who combine local reference with exploration of the universal principles of their art (Antoni Gaudí's analysis of gravity, Joan Miró's "primitive" colors, or Antoni Tàpies's experiments with texture), Guerín is deeply invested in the materiality of the image. This means not only that his cinema contains a meditation on the medium,[3] but also that it concerns itself with the emergence and disappearance of the visible, that is to say, with the historicity of "seeing." Asked about the relation between his previous film, *Tren de sombras* (*Shadow Train*, 1996) and Theo Angelopoulos's *The Gaze of Ulysses* (1995), Guerín replied: "Yes, of course, it was inevitable that in 1995 those films were produced, and others that also cast a retrospective look upon the material with which we work, namely celluloid" (Carrión, Jorge 41). His retrospective look was not a celebration of film's centennial but a sober reflection on the flipside of that event: the consciousness of the medium's caducity. *Tren de sombras* was a splendid practical demonstra-

tion of Paolo Cherchi Usai's theoretical assertion that "the intention of bringing the moving image back to its supposed primordial state leads to the creation of fictive artifacts" (101).

Having paid his dues to the centennial commemoration of cinema, Guerín continued to work on the nature of visual representation. His next film, *En construcción*, was an extended metaphor on the instability of the visible, the overlaying of images, and the production of "sight" at "sites" with shifting coordinates. At these sites the traditional ontology associated with photography (and with cinema as an extension of the latter) gives way to metamorphosis, rediscovery, and the historicizing of the gaze. Santiago Vila notes the use of "primitive stylemes" for experimental purposes, above all the editing of static shots in the tradition of Lumière cinema (29). In this film, the visual experience becomes central to many of the characters, whose main action often consists in commenting on what they see, or simply in looking with desire, curiosity, blankness, or impotence. Reduced to the condition of spectators, they stand, however, at the intersection of privileged coordinates marked by the presence of the camera. Temporally, the film is located at the end of the century that exhausted the project of modernity. Visually, the end of an era is underscored by the change in optical technology. For the first time Guerín uses the video camera, and the low resolution of the image aptly conveys the fading of a historical place.

However, a disappearing place connotes the demise of the subject through which it came into existence. Hence, Guerín's tribute to a lost dwelling through an extended view of its deconstruction is also an allegory of the fading of the transcendental subjectivity that used to guarantee the lucidity and cohesion of the image-world from its position behind the camera. Now the classic subject, no longer secure in the pre-empirical categories of time and space, ceases to ground the image. Reliance on the fixed camera only enhances this impression, gainsaying the lens's integrative power as out-of-focus figures slide into and out of the static frames. The dominant effect is to alter the traditional relation between the subject's stability and the mutability of appearances. Immersed in the experience of visual dispersion, the subject is unable to restore coherence to the world. Henceforth it is technology's disembodied vision that organizes the image, however blind or insensitive to the human need for harmony.

The removal of the subjective look, evoked by quotations from Julio Salvador's *Sin la sonrisa de Dios* (1955), Enric Ripoll Freixes' *El alegre Paralelo* (1960), and Joan Colom's 8-millimeter footage from 1959, leaves behind perceptually "empty lots" where the image's ontology has been pulled down. What remains of the image is not the trace of a referent

in a passive medium but a synthesis of technology-driven processes. The graffiti eyes staring blindly at a flight of pigeons in the title sequence warn about the incongruity between the anachronistic biological body and the technological organization of the gaze. The discrepancy between the two kinds of vision is further highlighted by the model of the renovated neighborhood shown in the billboard to which the camera cuts next, suggesting that we are seeing this image through the riveting power of the inorganic gaze.

In Guerín's previous films there is a suggestion of an elusive original reality haunting what can be seen in the present. This is as true of the archaic customs recorded in his earlier film *Innisfree* (1990) as of the "ghosts" of *Tren de sombras* and the indigenous residents of the Raval in *En construcción*. I do not mean the characters moving before the camera like flotsam from a shipwreck. These people no longer have anything to do with the Barrio Chino, which refers us to images anchored in the origins of cinema. I mean rather the cats surprised in the nooks and crannies of the bulldozed terrain and the dead brought to light by the camera's excavating action. These pre- and post-social bodies appear in the interstices of a constructed reality from which certain experiences are tabooed. And as a result of their anachronistic presence, the image relapses into a mystical condition and becomes ghostly. As if regressing to the prehistory of sound, the image regains its autonomy from the soundtrack, casting doubt on the medium's integration of the senses. The chasm between the silence of the cats and the roar of the bulldozers, or between the muteness of the dead and the blabber of bystanders, reveals the existence of a layered experience, whose visual equivalent is the stratified image described by Deleuze with a metaphor that Guerín renders literal.

> It is as if, speech having withdrawn from the image to become founding act, the image, for its part, raised the foundations of space, the "strata," those silent powers of before or after speech, before or after man. The visual image becomes *archaeological, stratigraphic, tectonic*. Not that we are taken back to prehistory (there is an archaeology of the present), but to the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms. (*Cinema 2* 244)

Seen with the skull's fleshless eyes, the archaeological image becomes literally blind; something the film registers by blackening the frame. In the meantime, at the upper layers of this tectonic image of time, the living project their Platonic shadows on the fence of the construction site as on a cinema screen. There is in addition the phantasmagoria of

disembodied voices and sounds adrift from the image, excavated in different terrain from that which sustains the visual forms and atomized like the "any-space-whatevers," which, according to Deleuze, are modern cinema's characteristic spaces (*Cinema 2* 243).

Since the arrival of the talkies, the soundtrack has often been used to suggest a sliding of meaning that questions cinema's alleged integration of experience. There are acoustic chasms just as there are visual ones. If skeletons come out of their secular hiding places to produce the vertigo of the gaze, and if the homeless, society's living dead, turn their bottomless gaze on the ruins of solidarity, then a Christmas carol sung by childish voices drifts uncannily into the frame from a deep linguistic stratum. Not for nothing has one bystander asked before if Catalan was the language spoken by the corpses. This aural event completing the exotic image of a white Christmas by the Mediterranean is just a little too pat, and the viewer realizes with a jolt that the frame belies perception. The epiphany of the snow seen for the first time by the Berber immigrant is brought to a poetic climax by the carol until we are brought up short by the realization that the social integration signified by the shot of the school building is as much an aesthetic effect as the carol sung in a fading language or the sleek architecture that gradually alters the district.

The film is not a sociological study, however, and in that sense it is a mistake to classify it as a documentary on the strength of its alleged sociological truth. The dead, surprised in their posthistorical sleep, do not signal a conflict between reality and appearance, nor do they anchor the documentary in anthropological truth as opposed to cinematic fiction. They are a foundational image, and thus a structuring one. As objectified witnesses of the various incarnations and destructions of the district, they show the relation between vision's interiority and the fragmentariness and contingency of the image world. In other words, these remains that paralyze the work and fixate all gazes are a limit image of the relation between degradation (urban, social, moral, biological) and fascination.

Despite the film's title, it is not construction but destruction (or perhaps deconstruction) that keeps Guerín's viewers in thrall. As in *Tren de sombras*, the possibility of regressing to earlier strata of the image brings linearity into question. Now, however, it is no longer a matter of showing the image's chemical base through its deterioration. *Tren de sombras* manipulated mimetic illusionism in order to destroy the belief in a primary object made available through the image. But the idea of a train of images projected by means of a light source still presupposes retinal retention as the basis for cinematic movement. The purpose of the sequences showing how vulnerable cinematic illusion is not only to chemical deterioration but also to a change of speed is to expose the

deception of the eye by mechanical means. Nevertheless, the retinal retention theory has long been discarded in favor of the "phi effect" advanced by Wertheimer and based on Gestalt principles. In practice, the persistence of optical impressions in the retina does not give rise to movement but to blurring and overlap (MacPhee 102). *En construcción* does not indulge in such metacinematic commentary, but the low video resolution (72 dpi) presages the inevitable degradation of the images, which is anticipated in the still coarser grain of the archival materials in black and white.

While cinematic convention interprets black and white as a marker of the past, Guerín uses monochrome footage from the fifties to recall the existence of a visual tradition of the Barrio Chino. In this way he acknowledges the historicity of images and therewith their corruptibility. But film not only ages through oxidation or the advent of newer technology, such as the magnetic tape. The transformation of the context also adds to its obsolescence. By incorporating into his movie the visual memory of the very same streets, Guerín underscores the dependence of images on a cultural context that is even more unstable and perishable than celluloid. "Film history," says Cherchi Usai, "proceeds by an effort to explain the loss of cultural ambience that has evaporated from the moving image in the context of a given time and place" (21). Furthermore, "[a]ny endeavour to protect the moving image from the environmental and psychological factors leading to its decay is doomed to failure as long as the viewing experience is conceived of as an event that can be repeated indefinitely" (103). The evaporation of cultural substance in the half-century separating the black-and-white sequences from the initial color shot of *En construcción* amounts to a tectonic fault line inside the image, while the leap backward in the history of cinema makes of those black-and-white vestiges the equivalent of the remnants found at the archaeological site. When cultural knowledge eventually dries up, the images will then be as blind as the skulls that paralyze the construction work and deliver the present to a mystical communion in the gaze. Guerín treats the medium as a site for the construction of images that emerge not in virginal space but in the realm of the already seen. What he poetically calls "an endless continuum of traces of light" (Carrión 41) is more precisely a dialectic of after-images emerging on the site of previous images that are never entirely gone from cultural memory,[4] although it may no longer be possible to retrieve them in their original luminousness.

Another purpose served by the use of monochrome is to set one of the most constructed images of Barcelona, the Barrio Chino, against the flow of time through the work, conversations, games, and trivia rendered

in the color-realism of the everyday. Only the passage of time unifies the anecdotes and microhistories of this scriptless film, just as color suggests the gradual transition of things into each other through nuances, as Benjamin noted in a fragment titled "A Child's Vision of Color" (qtd. MacPhee 180). By stressing the slow rhythm of transitions, Guerín reverses the code that governed the use of monochrome in the previous decade. "In the image culture of the 1990s," writes Paul Grainge, "black and white assumed the capacity of simulating slowness in a climate of speed, evoking time in a culture of space, of suggesting authenticity in a world of simulation and pastiche" (72). Certainly, Guerín laces black-and-white footage in the early sequences of the film in order to distinguish two historical modulations of the same space, but it would be naive to assume that the temporal depth created by this means amounts to a dirge for the loss of an alleged authenticity. The grayish, ruinous apartment buildings and the cavernous entryways to the brothels and by-the-hour rental bedrooms, which the film displays as it dips into archival memory, do not signify a denser cultural ground. If those casual sequences appear to transcend the image culture in which they are caught up, they do not, for all that, direct our gaze to a truer, more spontaneous aesthetic.

On the contrary, Guerín manages to suggest authenticity in the realm of the present and in the province of color. He accomplishes this, especially though not uniquely, by mimicking the passage of time with the film's slow rhythm and a generous helping of nearly static images. Thus, the everyday is as much an artistic construction as anything that is under construction in this film. Through editing (excellent job by Mercedes Alvarez and Núria Esquerra), Guerín speeds up the historical reminiscence in black and white, rendering the image of a bustling, eroticized Barrio Chino a counterpart to an industrial metropolis signified by the fuming smokestacks of the Canadiense electricity plant in the Paral·lel. Conversely, he slows time by focusing relentlessly on the tedium of lives caught up in the mutation of a district with which the city's transformation since the 1980s finally catches up. During these two decades, Barcelona stopped being Spain's industrial engine to become a tourist center, a change revealed by the full-color crane-shots of the illuminated smokestacks, witnesses of a past that remains only through objects that can be aesthetically recodified.

Another recurring image is the turning clock on top of the Bilbao Vizcaya Bank seen over the rooftops. The camera's repeated tracking of the white disk suggests that history is not on the financial district's dial and the barrio's last hour has struck. One century after this formerly industrial area became Barcelona's red-light district, the Raval is catching

up with the rest of the city. Instead of the proverbial prostitutes and pimps, working-class families, children, and elderly people crop up on the screen. From the Grup Escolar Collaso i Gil, directly across from the construction site, voices of children singing a Christmas carol are heard during a rare snow sequence. A city landmark, the church of Sant Pau del Camp, the oldest building in Barcelona, appears repeatedly and is the subject of conversations, even part of a selling pitch by the realtor.

But what about memory? Does it take flight, like experience, into the realm of myth? The swarming black-and-white images of the Barrio Chino's environs, with popular references like the tavern "Bodega Apolo" (which later reappears as a slot-machine palace, "Atracciones Apolo"), cut suddenly to a fixed-camera, full-color sequence of a bare space crowded with pigeons. Nature abhors the void and fills the space created by demolition. A caption superimposed on the shot of the decaying walls tells the viewer what the film is about: "Things seen and heard during the construction of a new building in 'El Chino,' a popular neighborhood of Barcelona, which came into existence with the century and died with it." Like so much else in the film, this statement of intentions is disconcerting. On the one hand, it turns the images into witnesses, bearers of the "fiscal" role vis-à-vis reality that Guerín disclaims (Carrión 41), and on the other, it blots out the consciousness of what is actually happening on the screen, namely, the deployment of stylistic maneuvers translating actuality into a mise-en-scène for the event announced in the caption. This event is none other than a death, and so, the film's forensic project hinges on its ability to capture being at the moment when it exits the scene. If in a sense cinema has always been about arresting life at the very moment it sheds its circumstances, Guerín's caption underscores the incongruity of a project that seeks to document the removal of collective images (here, of a topical urban representation) by means of other images. If cinema is "an endless continuum of traces of light," then the dissemination of consciousness along this infinite spectrum would seem to prevent the identification of the event, understood as the coincidence between the temporality of the process represented and the temporality of its reenactment in the images. In claiming to transmit a certain lore about the (expiring) life of a community (things seen and heard), Guerín does not, however, lay claim to transparency but alludes rather to the necessarily fragmentary depositions of limited, casual bystanders. Furthermore, the expression "things seen and heard" has a vague and mysterious ring more appropriate to legend than to accurate reportage. The caption both establishes and belies the film's documentary intentions by calling into question the possibility not of authentic documentation but of documenting authenticity.

Sleepy Hollow

Although the ostensible theme of *En construcción* is the thickness of time and the ineluctability of change, the film is also about the persistence and even the making of ghosts. In other words, it is about the gap between memory and meaning. The ability to visualize the gap depends on strategies of representation capable of endowing the cinematic surfaces with a vividness that resists the normative models. The first formal expression of the gap is the deceptive coincidence between the film's temporality and that of the urban process represented, a kind of trompe l'oeil inscribed in the title, which refers both to the diegetic activity of demolition and building and to its cinematic analogy in the technical labor that synthesizes the spectator's experience of time.

Guerín compresses 120 hours, or a little less than two years of on-site filming, into only two hours of morose cinema. The result is an uncanny impression of familiarity with the workers, neighbors, and even the homeless who settle amid the debris. Why uncanny? As Kinder reminds us, Freud's definition of the uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar" (qtd. Kinder, "Uncanny Visions" 13). In other words, it is an interruption of our everyday certainties and familiarities, a distancing and an estrangement of what seemed to be ours. According to Nicholas Royle, "[i]t can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" (1). Although the Barrio Chino was always uncanny in this sense, the film is uncanny, first of all, in its defeat of cinematic convention. If Kinder is right and "all moviegoing is a form of tourism that fosters nomadic subjectivity" ("Documenting the National" 87), then *En construcción* would be an exception to the rule. It fosters neither tourism (what tourist would linger by a construction site?) nor nomadism (for, as viewers, we turn into subjective homesteaders of a district whose day-to-day change the camera allows us to experience). Furthermore, our slow familiarization with the film's "characters" militates against the exoticism exploited by Barrio Chino literature. And although the uncanny reenters the film through the behavioral quirks and facial archaisms of the people we meet, we are not given leave to romanticize their otherness. Rather, our uncanny feeling arises from peeking into the fate of people trapped in repetitious, mechanistic gestures that appear ever so slightly off the mark. This is as true of the homeless old mariner and preening collector of bric-à-brac (Antonio Atar) as of his naive interlocutor at the bar, of the good-hearted prostitute (Juana Rodríguez) as of her numbskull of a boyfriend (Iván Guzmán), of the alienated Galician bricklayer (Santiago

Segade) as of his teasing accessory, the Berber construction hand (Abdel Aziz El Mountassir).

None of these characters are at home in their world, no matter how insistently Guerín's camera homes in on them. All of them are in transit, whether between homes (the squatters and the homeless, the displaced neighbors and potential customers), countries (the recent immigrants), languages (as discussed below), or occupations: the young recruit (Juan Manuel López), the Moroccan apprentice (Abdelsalam Madris). Some, like the construction workers and the hidden camera operators, are temporarily brought into the district for this construction project. All of them are uprooted, estranged, out-of-the-ordinary for as long as the film lasts. Theirs is, ironically, a metaphoric fate that embraces and sucks us into the frame that turns them from marginal figures into real presences with a measure of power over our perceptions.

In his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, Anthony Vidler elevates transience and homelessness to representative status for late modernity. "Estrangement and unhomeliness have emerged as the intellectual watchwords of the century, given periodic material and political force by the resurgence of homelessness itself, a homelessness generated sometimes by war, sometimes by the unequal distribution of wealth" (9). Likewise, Guerín endows his characters with the value of epochal symbols. As they move through the temporal and spatial interstices of the neighborhood, they emanate an undercurrent of anxiety that envelops us as we witness the piecemeal deconstruction of the city.

But if the uncanny relates to the experience of fright, are we justified in using the term for a seemingly straightforward documentary about demolition and building in a downtown neighborhood? Why uncanny, after all? One answer would be that cinema, since its inception, is inextricable from the gothic project of reanimating the dead. On the basis of projective scientific discourse from the turn of the nineteenth century, Carsten Strathausen affirms that "Transgressing the boundary between life and death as well as between absence and presence, the imaginary signifier of film is nothing if not a symptom of uncanniness itself" (17). *En construcción* contains a reflection on cinema's capacity to breathe new life into the shadows of the departed. Already in *Tren de sombras*, the blotches of light running before our eyes allow us to see film's artificial eternity bitten by the worm of time. The latter movie contains a metafilmic evocation in the pale shapes of archival cinema. Lacking color, the lifeblood of illusion, those black-and-white images ascend from the pit of the departed to haunt the entire film.

The neighborhood itself appears ghostly in the ruinous surfaces of buildings frozen in the long, fixed-camera shots. At one point a

medium crane-shot reveals the husk of a disemboweled building. At another, a wall with graffiti eyes painted all over it returns our gaze before it is demolished. A visual pun on the effect of invasive looks on the district's self-consciousness? Furthermore, lacking a clear plot line, the documentary advances at the pace of the construction work. This places it at a polar distance from the avant-garde city films of the 1920s, such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City* (1927), which fascinated audiences through their use of accelerated montage (Strathausen 27). Deprived of tracking shots (with the signal exception of the last sequence, which appears to be shot with a handheld camera) and firmly anchored in steady camera work, *En construcción* harks back to the early documentary tradition of the Lumière brothers, eschewing the use of advanced means or special effects. Even panoramic shots over the roofs of the district are not god-like aerial views but crane shots or shots from the tops of buildings, relaying the vision conceivable from a high point on the construction site. Uncanny, therefore, is not the obsolescence of the human perspective through the technical achievement of cinematic vision, but the embedding of individual and class stories in a network of images governed by the rhythm of changes imposed by a long-term project. Uncanny too is the mesmerizing effect of that rhythm on the spectator, who turns not into a tourist or a thrilled voyeur but a bystander like those showing up at any open work site, including the one in the film.

But the fright associated with the uncanny relates above all to the gaze. "In terms of film theory, the gaze is the point at which the illusion of realism wavers" (Krips 99). There are moments when we doubt the film's documentary good faith. Do the workers always speak spontaneously before the camera, or do they follow a minimal script? Did the camera just happen to catch Abdel Aziz's description of his nightmares about a ghost, or did Guerín prompt this scene in order to verbalize through his most poetic character the anxiety induced by the experience of haunting? These problems notwithstanding, the film actually moves into uncanny territory when the gaze disrupts the everyday realism and stops the symbolic process by which things and events are subsumed under the idea of an ordinary construction. After the initial scenes, the reiteration of images of crumbling, dismantling, and demolishing achieve an excess of meaning.

I would not go so far as to claim that such insistence on demolition and ruin causes fright, but the film's undeniable metaphoric power does arouse a certain anxiety. Guerín's documentary is a poetic meditation on the ineluctable decomposition of all historical formations, one that foregoes narrative mastery and instead exposes the viewer to a certain

degree of existential involvement. It is not by means of pedagogical voice-over or a synthetic story line but through the revelations of the camera that "one gradually penetrates into [the scene of] degradation" (Guerín in Carrión 41). The relentless documenting of the degradation of the physical traces of the past is uncanny because we recognize it as the counterpart of regeneration, and that recognition jolts us from our ordinary habits of perception. Suddenly, we take stock of the loss that accompanies every creation and perceive how the building begins to age even before it is finished, how corruption lies at its foundation in the most literal sense.

The sequence about the unearthing of archeological remains is paradigmatic in that we see how the gaze paralyzes every pragmatic intention and holds everyday activity in abeyance. From the wound inflicted on the city's surface an image emerged that, according to Guerín, unexpectedly changed the shooting plans and the meaning of the film: "This transformed the entire film, because this sequence made me abandon a bunch of parallel lines. The film could no longer feed on stories about the construction, because [the latter's only raison d'être was] to be the sounding board for an entire neighborhood" (Riambau "A Plot" 196). The surfacing dead mark the incursion of the real into the structure of the film. This irruption is, as Víctor Erice put it, "that open wound in the body of fiction through which History passes" (184). Or perhaps something anterior to history, since the wound is better accounted for by the Lacanian notion of the gaze.

The gaze is for Lacan the point at which the real shatters our symbolic systems, causing perplexity and anxiety. The source of the anxiety is buried in the unconscious, in a primal scene that has been repressed. Repression is of course connected with the subject's frailty and with the precariousness of the symbolic order, of which the city is the visible model. But the anxiety binding the gaze of bystanders to the exhumed skeletons arises from the onlookers' incapacity to subsume what they see under a stable meaning. Such operation requires the force of a cultural mediation that is lacking at the moment, since repression obliterates the memory of the primal from consciousness. What we have, then, is a spontaneous audience of bystanders (functioning as a stand-in for the film's spectators) who are literally haunted by lack of meaning. By pitting the archaic and immemorial against the enlightened project of urban reform, the sequence of the Roman burial ground brings into the film a strong gust of the uncanny, which, as Royle reminds us, is inextricably bound up with the history of the Enlightenment and Romanticism (8). Thus, the uncanny signals the limits of interpretation and the return of images

to their condition of signs that fascinate through their floating signifiers. But what is a floating signifier, if not a ghostly trace intervening between image and meaning and interrupting the illusion of transparency?

Harassed by technology, reality renders literal Roland Barthes's spooked intuition that in the spectacle of any reproduced image lurks "that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (*Camera Lucida* 9). Recognizing the significance of this true reality-effect, Guerín nearly concentrated the film on the scene at the burial ground: "it was a soundbox larger than the local perspective; it was the intimate X-ray, the sum of sensibilities confronting the essential image: the skull" (Escur 17). This sequence functions as a *mise-en-abîme* for the viewer's fascinated attention to the extensive images of deconstruction. The tearing down of walls, roofs, carpentry, and plumbing conveys the same open secret about the urban process that onlookers contemplate with a mixture of curiosity, uneasiness, and revulsion in the hollow where the corpses lie.

"Imagine that! You live on top of the dead and don't even know it," says a woman, capturing the banality of the uncanny. "It must be from the time of the war," says another woman, alluding to the Civil War. A man, who has the war in the Balkans in mind, ventures: "an ethnic massacre." Preoccupation with ethnic identity runs around the circle of onlookers like wild fire. It is as if the vision of death spurred them to determine the historical significance of the dead, not so much to ascertain the cultural definition of the site as to counter the uncanny elision of time that voids the differences of nationality among the bystanders. A Spanish immigrant, imprecisely aware of the city's Catalan history, asks, "Did they already speak Catalan?" while another, associating antiquity with Latin, replies, "They spoke Latin back then." Yet another suggests, "In my opinion, [the corpse] is an Arab," while a woman, on being informed that the site is a Roman cemetery, exclaims, just as anachronistically, "Romans! So, they are not Spaniards." The inadvertent humor of the pedantic explanations and wild guessing adds an ironic dimension to the uncanny, which is never without a touch of the comic.

All these people turn their gaze to the bodily remains again and again, unable to tear themselves from the sight and the site. "It was a luxury to see Pakistanis, Moroccans, Catalans . . . in a confluence of looks, religions, children who discover death for the first time," says Guerín (Escur 17). And indeed, for all the sobriety of the setting, the scene is one of luxury, of excess, in the etymology of the word *luxus*. Excess of the gaze, for the luxury Guerín speaks of is a surplus of seeing. Such a feast of the eyes, however, is due not so much to the intensification of the gaze

through the multitude of onlookers as to the meta-observation introduced by the camera and signified in the director's use of the word "see." The word alludes symbolically to the true surplus of cinematic observation, namely the audience. Guerín constructs the latter as an amplified circle of bystanders transfixed by the same discovery of the primordial truth that haunts modernity. "The city is looking for its future," says Guerín, "Then it bumps against its remote past and that discovery shakes the consciousness of the entire neighborhood" (Escur 17). There could be no better illustration of the uncanny.

After all the chatter, the camera cuts to a medium shot of the deserted excavation at night, revealing the silent skulls on the ground, then tilts up to show the moon fading behind moving clouds. There is a trace of the gothic in this sequence, suggesting one of the literary sources of the uncanny. Like the skulls, all the images of wrecking and dilapidation that we absorb in two hours are remarkably discrete about their meanings. It is the viewer who, drawing on his or her cultural memory, assigns truth, or more precisely documentary value to the film. Hence, the knowledge excavated from the images reveals as much about the viewer's enabling premises and blind spots as the comments of bystanders tell about their origin and implantation in the city in which they happen to reside. "Be it ever so eloquent," says Cherchi Usai, "the moving image is like a witness who is unable to describe an event without an intermediary. The ability to transform it into evidence, true or false, is inherently linked to a decision to preserve, alter, or suppress the memory of the circumstances under which the image was produced" (31). And so, we must now turn to those circumstances.

The Sad Rambla

En construcción offers a double perspective. The Raval, as the neighborhood has been called since the 1970s, is seen in long panoramic shots from on high and in medium shots at street or working-site level. In addition, close-ups and some extreme close-ups reveal the people who move inside this area, acquainting us with the bodies that leave their traces in the form of labor, play, or seduction. The intermittent change of perspective replicates the temporal displacement accomplished by the transition from monochrome to color. If the close-ups engage the movement of bodies and animate the streets of the Raval, the panoramic shots challenge urbanism's claim on regeneration (a biological metaphor) by focusing on the buildings as carcasses and on the district as a graveyard of vast ar-

chaeological proportions. In this sense, Guerín's visual austerity disengages the mediated images from both mythopoetic endeavors and commodified pseudo-critical reappropriations of the endeavors themselves.

There is hardly another precinct of Barcelona with a more mythical background than the Barrio Chino. At the same time, no other area has provoked as much civic concern as this marginal sector of the old city. Since the seventeenth century, authorities have considered this formerly extramural zone a dangerous area ridden with disease. Late-nineteenth-century citizens also voiced concern, but calls for reform were muted by the creation of the district's erotic myth in the 1920s (McDonogh 349). Under the Pla Macià, conceived by Le Corbusier and the Catalan architects of the G.A.T.C.P.A.C.[5] in the early 1930s, the Barrio Chino would have been rebuilt from the ground up. In a novel by Pierre Mac Orlan from this period, the protagonist alludes to the district's impending disappearance: "Naturally, it was in the Barrio Chino, which is disappearing, that I took my first steps in the city" (126). But by the 1930s the district's "local color" had its apologists. Sebastià Gasch, a connoisseur of Barcelona's nightlife, objected to half-baked reform, deriding Le Corbusier's plans to transform the district into a showcase for modern international architecture (9).

In the name of poetry and unity of style, Gasch wished to preserve a slum area, whose misery jolts us from the photographs taken by Margaret Michaelis in the mid-1930s. But the Pla Macià was not to be. The Civil War prevented it from coming to fruition, and the Franco decades elapsed without any improvement in the decaying and overcrowded district. During the mayoralty of Josep Maria de Porcioles, City Hall planned the Avenida García Morato, a boulevard that would cut through the Barrio Chino. But this plan also remained a blueprint. Then, in the late 1990s, City Hall took up the idea again, opening a concourse, a Rambla, at the core of the Raval, the largest public work ever undertaken in the area. It is on an official poster of this project that Guerín trains his camera at the beginning of the film in a lingering stare that serves as an establishing shot.

From a close-up and then an extreme close-up of the poster, the camera cuts to the street, where we meet the first of the film's characters, a street person perorating about Barcelona's flaws and unfolding the project that will be realized with European "connection funds." Next the camera cuts to the first of many scenes of wrecking. Old furniture and appliances are thrown out of a window, raising clouds of dust.

The significance of the public works does not escape commentary. Building that lasts is the subject of discussion between the foreman

(Juan Manuel López) and one of the workers at lunch. Comparing their own work with the stone fabric of the twelfth-century Sant Pau del Camp, the church standing just across the street, the worker finds something uncanny in such feats of building. Television, gleaming through open balcony doors, inspires the conversation, broadcasting Howard Hawks's *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955). Serendipity or shrewd tampering with reality? The pyramids were of course not just massive public works but also huge tombs. And while Óscar Tusquets's building, seen under construction, is neither luxurious nor monumental, it unexpectedly acquires the patina of a funereal shrine, a supplement that the promoters are quick to commodify.

A subtle nostalgia pervades Guerín's look at this scene of urban renewal, showing that "El Chino" did not give up its mythical ghost so easily. But he is far from the extravagance of commentators who see "colonization" (Carrión 41) in the eradication of the slums and the hesitant and inconclusive return of the middle class to the neighborhood. Notwithstanding the final commercial scenes, the film merely indexes the new social tendencies. In 1995, despite the demolitions and new public spaces, the old core of Barcelona still had higher density (235 inhabitants per hectare as compared to 170), an older population (36.4 percent were elderly), a lower per capita income, and almost three times the rate of immigrants than the rest of the city (Fabre and Huertas 363). Eight years later (three after the production of *En construcción*), extensive reform has not brought life and excitement to the neighborhood. The Pakistanis call the Rambla del Raval "the sad Rambla" in contrast to the traditional one just a few blocks away (Capella). City Hall's surgical interventions and sustained efforts to import new architecture and public buildings into this area did not lead to a more integrated district. On the contrary, despite the good intentions and questionable architecture, the neighborhood's marginality has augmented. Commenting on the conflict among populations of diverse origins, architect Juli Capella observes: "Back then we presumed that planning could improve and dignify the neighborhoods, but it is clear now that [this is true] only if planning goes hand in hand with political measures" (Capella).

Ethnic Diversity and the Death of History

Between 1996 and 2003, foreign immigration to the city grew by 500 percent, with most of the growth in 2001, the year when *En construcción* premiered. In 2003, 47 percent of the residents of the Raval were foreign immigrants from thirty-four different countries (Ramos Rioja). Given

this diversity and the growing predominance of people with different cultural memories, the old pattern of difference between immigrants from rural Spain and autochthonous Catalans became obsolete. What remains, however, is the pattern of displacement and eradication of the autochthonous language, as the new immigrants adopt and in turn reinforce the language that the state imposes through all means. *En construcción* offers a good diagnosis of linguistic patterns in Barcelona, as people in the film use, unprompted, the language(s) of ordinary interrelation. The key scene is furnished by the spontaneous gathering of neighbors around the excavated burial ground. There, as Guerín remarked, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Catalans (and he might have added the less exotic and prevalent Spaniards) converge around the common preoccupation with the origin of the dead (Escur 3). "Whence the dead?" is the general question, to which "Whence death?" is the unspoken subtext. Why and how, this universal passing away? Why are there corruption and history and forgetting?

In that scene we hear several languages: Arabic, Catalan, and above all Spanish. Someone asks of the skeletons whether they already spoke Catalan. Already? In death? Have they *already* learned to speak Catalan, after all the years under the ground? Catalan, the language of the dead, a dead language, on a par with Latin, which is of course the answer to the riddle about the tongue in the skull. "No, they spoke Latin back then." Highly privatized and relegated to institutional uses, it has little presence in the marketplace. Taken up by few newcomers and gradually abandoned by native speakers, this language is on its way to becoming Catalonia's Latin.

At the site where work is in progress, Spanish is used exclusively as workers talk, command, protest, quarrel, sing, dream, flirt, and express their condolences in that language. Children at play use this language too, and neighbors tune in their television sets to the state, not the regional channels. Then, as in a dream, Catalan is heard during the exotic snowstorm, the words drifting in from the school across the street. Fleeting and illusory, like the snow that melts away on reaching the street, Catalan comes alive for a moment in the voices of children singing a Christmas carol. It is heard again during the open house at the apartment building, against the background of Spanish-speaking carpenters and heating installers. Some potential buyers speak Catalan before switching to Spanish, others Spanish, yet others are linguistically mixed couples. While it would be foolish to draw sociological conclusions from a few minutes of edited documentary, the linguistic picture offered by the film merits reflection. The mixed linguistic composition of the customers throws into disarray attempts to treat Catalan as a class idiolect. Patently, the language divide does not run neatly between old-time residents and newcomers, as one

critic has suggested, but, if anything, along age lines, as some of the young professionals' identities are, like the district, undergoing reconstruction. Customers are, for the most part, young, upwardly mobile couples. An older retiree couple displays the puffy ticks of insecure low middle-class. Most of them are clearly unhappy with the surroundings, but they are all attracted by the promotional prices and the prospect of gentrification.

In the film what remains unsaid is as significant as what people say. The unsettling surfaces refer us to an unconscious that is not only structured like a language (Lacan), but is synonymous with the structuring power of language. Considering the film's translation of prosaic but paradoxically dream-like images into the terms of a symbolic system like a language, is it fair to classify it as "cinema against forgetting," as one of the earliest reviews, published in Barcelona's daily *La Vanguardia*, put it? (Escur). To some extent, yes, but on condition that the film's unconscious be accounted for. This would be accomplished if those dream-like images were treated literally as screen memories, which is Freud's near-cinematic term for particularly intense images whose meaning evades the conscious mind. In those memories the inaccessibility of meaning is compensated by increased affectivity. The term "screen" does not refer here to a projective surface but to a defensive one. Not to the background that allows the figure to appear but to the figure that occludes the background. In Mary Ann Doane's words: "The detail—that which stands out in a scene—becomes a *screen*. Itself emptied of content, the screen memory attains value through a relation, a spatial and temporal connection; it is in the 'neighborhood' of meaning. The screen memory becomes legible through this connection and is ultimately subordinated to a more significant psychical scenario" (166–67). The film's most affection-laden image, that of the exhumed corpses, is the film's master signifier for inaccessibility of original meaning. It attains value not in itself, as a universal symbol operative in any and all codes, but in a precise spatial and temporal connection, that of a city coming to know itself in its very instability; coming, that is, into the neighborhood of primordial social meaning. Might the underlying psychical scenario of the city not reside precisely in the tension between structure and contingency, as expressed in the interruption of the everyday by the emergence of the screen memory? Guerín himself underscores the importance of an unconscious everyday, which he would bring to the light of the camera, realizing Walter Benjamin's idea of film as the revelation of the unconscious side of ordinary perception.

> There is some confusion about the witness bearing value of the film image. [. . .] There are times when reality has such gravity that the only honest thing you can do is to render it as such.

> There it is, I act as a prosecutor not a filmmaker. Reality always determines what you must be. It's not my case; my case is a series of strategies to render visible things that otherwise would remain hidden in the everyday. (Carrión 41)

The most basic strategies are the types of shots used to produce the visual event. It is significant that Guerín studiously avoids the panoramic shot, which is the most characteristic for cityscapes. In fact, he avoids panning shots altogether and privileges instead the takes with a still camera. The camera's immobility and the avoidance of aerial shots run against the grain of city films, in which the traveling or the panning camera negotiates the pace of the ocular subject through visual space. The city symphony films of the 1920s are the classical loci of such practices, but recent Barcelona films such as Almodovar's *All About My Mother* (1999), with its famous tunnel acceleration bursting into the panoramic view of the city, or the camera's slow travel around Gaudí's Sagrada Família church, confirm the relation between moving shots and the evocation of urban depth in the screen's third dimension: movement. Guerín's preference for the still camera serves to establish the Raval's marginality, an enclosure whose boundary is blazed by recognizable markers: the white dial of the clock in Plaça de Catalunya, the smokestacks in the Paral·lel, and a contrasting skyline. This visual syntax is important, for, as Doane informs us, in the early years of cinema, "the pan was generally reserved for the unstaged, on-the-scene actuality, while stage scenes were static" (153). Does Guerín's preference for the fixed camera obey a metafilmic logic, signaling the artificial reenactment of the things that are seen and heard on screen? Or does it point to the Raval's upgrading as part of a more general plan of urban staging? The careful composition of the film as an image of change framed within the shots of a still camera contrasts with the moving shots of the black-and-white citations at the beginning of the film. The casualness associated with the moving shot supports the impression of visual contingency, and thus the image's documentary "authenticity." What is more, coming from a more primitive technological stratum, the black-and-white sequences function as establishing shots for the theme of recollection that announces itself in the legendary "things seen and heard."

But how deep is the visual archaeology? While the film mourns the passing of a licentious quarter, it overlooks the area's past as the home of Catalan organized labor. This ward was internationally famous not only for its cavernous dives and cloddish dancing halls, for the once select but generally crass brothels, venereal clinics and condom shops, but also for its popular athenaeums and revolutionary leadership. The alienated Galician bricklayer seems unaware of this chapter of the district's history

and thus exemplifies its repression. Impatient with Abdel's ideological tirades, he curtly tells him that such ranting gives him a headache. The film fails to conjure up this past. This is ironical, for not far from the construction site, Salvador Seguí, a charismatic anarchist leader, was felled by the bullets of plainclothes policemen on March 10, 1923, and the spot, on carrer Cadena, disappeared in the 1990s to make room for the Rambla del Raval. The man who organized the first general strike in Spain, winning the eight-hour workday for Spanish workers, is not even history in a neighborhood to which the revolutionary eyes of the world used to turn. We must conclude with Strathausen, "any attempt to disclose the uncanny or to exorcise it by making it visible is bound to reproduce it" (16). For nothing is more uncanny than Abdel's monologic reembodiment of the nineteenth-century ideology that once resounded powerfully in these very streets.

Guerín allows the real to penetrate consciousness by disclosing the moments when our customary categories falter. Ultimately, the film may be about the risks involved in the audience's failure to recognize what it perceives. "The main thing is to look young," says Juani, as she makes up her face before walking the street. "Young" means as removed from the dead as possible, or more precisely, as safe from the real as one's defenses allow—for instance, by installing a curtain in the balcony to block the view of unsightly neighbors. "As in the old-time theatre," says one prospective owner, drawing an imaginary shutter between his imaginary private space and the building across the street. At once, this remark makes us aware that the screen principle is at work in the ruses with which other characters attempt to block the perception of the real.

To import an ideological correlation between class and language into the film is to confuse the social with the political and thus to mystify a complex, changing reality. Yet, as if to show the danger of drawing rigid inferences from a reality as complex as that of Barcelona, Guerín lets us know, off camera so to speak, that precisely Juani, an apparently uncomplicated twenty-five-year-old prostitute who has lived in the district since the age of eight, speaks not only Spanish but also Catalan and Arabic (Escur 3). Guerín's subtle touch comes undeniably from his ability to let the camera prod into the interstices of convention. As Esteve Riambau keenly remarks, "the director of *En construcción* knew how to find life where, at first glance, there were only stereotypes" ("José Luis Guerín" 187).

The Raval is now a multilingual space wrapped by the state language, which, being the ultimate medium of power, penetrates social discourse at every level. The film shows a polyglot reality slowly dissolving in an invasive uniformity. Historically, national construction in

the West has proceeded in this fashion. Wherever the nation-state has taken root, vernacular languages, cultures, and memories have been evacuated, reduced to a ghostly presence, to traces. For Derrida, all national (i.e. all modern state) culture "is rooted first of all in the memory and anxiety of a displaced—or displaceable—population. It is not only time that is out of joint, but space, space in time, spacing" (83). No wonder that the return of the displaced sends a chill down the spine of those who would rather forget. Marked by the stigma of the archaic—which is one signifier of the uncanny—the displaced and the displaceable are the measure of history, which advances through uprooting. *En construcción* is thus the visual story (or the microhistory) of a time coming out of joint in a space that ceased to be itself a long time ago. A space in progress, a spacing.

Does Guerín offer a choice, beyond the sober yet poetic recording of the relentless coming out of joint of a place? Although cinema is an effective fashioner of symbolic worlds, it is considerably younger and less pervasive than the great apparatuses that structure our perceptions and understanding. It would be utopian to expect cinema to entirely circumvent those apparatuses that cast the longest shadows on our lives. Yet, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, those apparatuses are not our fate. We can use them "to wage our wars of 'recognition' for lifeworlds that are threatened with extinction or eviction; and shape our worlds and images to frame those representations of home and exile through which we take possession of a world whose horizon is marked, all at once, by the spirit of arrival and the specter of departure" ("Arrivals" xii).

The Barrio Chino came and went like all places and all cultures. And yet, places, that is, meaningful spaces, and cultures, the sources of meaning, rarely leave the scene on their own. Most often they are evicted, cast into homelessness and abjection, and forced to carry their oppressors on their shoulders. The film's meditation on transience takes this disturbing turn when Juani carries Iván along the street in the closing sequence. In yet another homage to the visual history of Barcelona, this long traveling shot, which is obviously staged, recalls one of Colom's best-known photographs of the Barrio Chino (Terrasa 159). In that unsettling picture a young girl carries a self-satisfied boy on her back.[6] In replicating this image with the help of a prostitute and her pimp, Guerín may be extrapolating the fate of the children of the Barrio Chino from a forty-year-old snap, in one of the rare melodramatic moments in the film. Or he may be commenting on the ability of place to retain a memory of the images that have ever made an impression on its surfaces.

Cinema against forgetfulness, as a review defined Guerín's film, is cinema about the uncanny universality of the local and marginal. It

questions the univocity of history and the planning of space, conscious that administrated space results in various forms of exile. It captures the moments of transition from being to nonbeing in the nuances of bodies that keep moving through sheer willpower. And yet it knows itself to be susceptible to deconstruction and oblivion. Its motto against the planned extinction—of a district, a culture, a language, a memory or an identity—could well be Juani's last words in the film: "I'm strong but one can go only so far."

Notes

1. However, Guerín has obtained numerous critical distinctions for *En construcción*, among others the Special Jury Award at the San Sebastian Film Festival, the Goya Award for the best documentary film (2002), Spain's National Cinematography Award (2001), the Certificate of Merit of the Golden Gate Awards at the San Francisco Film Festival (2002). The film was a finalist for the European Film Academy's "Best European Movie" of 2002.

2. Sporadic attempts to produce a Catalan national cinema, such as Antoni Ribas's *La ciutat cremada* (1975) and his trilogy *Victòria* (1983–1984), or Josep Maria Forn's *Companys, procés a Catalunya* (1979), failed both among critics and at the box office. A few films succeeded in incorporating images of the national imaginary in a reflective way, often through the use of irony, throwing critical commonplaces out of kilter (Bigas Luna's *La teta i la lluna*, 1994; Ventura Pons's *Amic/Amat*, 1998; Marta Batllebó-Coll's *Costa Brava*, 1995).

3. "Film is precisely that, an endless continuum of traces of light. Unlike video or digital systems, film has a deep and direct relation with light, which endows it with an emotion that is lacking in other audiovisual media" (Guerín in Carrión 41).

4. On after-images, see Resina, "The Concept of After-Image."

5. The acronym G.A.T.C.P.A.C. stands for Grup d'Arquitectes i Tècnics Catalans per al Progrès de l'Arquitectura Contemporània (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture).

6. The photograph is reproduced in the catalogue *Tiempo de silencio. Panorama de la fotografía española de los años 50 y 60* (120).

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